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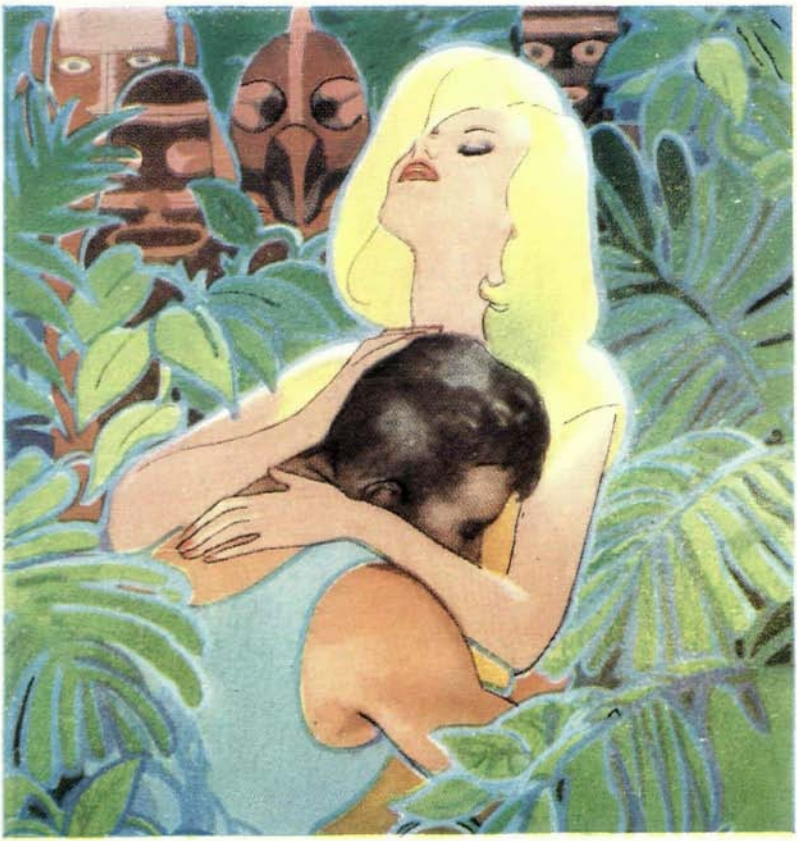
THE BEST STORIES by TODAY'S AUTHORS



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CAN I LEARN TO BE A WRITER?

The broadcast by the BBC entitled " Can I Learn to be a Writer?" was based on interviews with the senior coach of the London School of Journalism and some of our successful students who spoke of the help they had received in attaining their success.

Their testimony was reinforced by the editress of a great national periodical who spoke of the need for competent instruction in the writing of features intended for publication.

Further tributes to the LSJ were broadcast last year on January 28th, March 1st and October 20th.

A warning was given about the doubtful value of the claims made by certain schools. If you seek our advice, you will not be lured by lavish promises or bombarded with letters urging enrolment upon you. If you decide to become a member, you will work under a personal coach and your work will be fully criticised and returned promptly . . . no waiting for weeks or even months. And you will make money.

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OVER NOW

TO YOU...

THERE is something about *Instructions* that gives us the gooeys, right away.

You know the kind of thing that begins: " 1 in. flow and return pipes exceeding 15 ft. each in length must be lagged. 1¼ in. pipes exceeding 12 ft. must be lagged. The draw-off pipe to the taps must be a 'dead-leg' connection from the expansion pipe . . ."

The trouble is that the people who write *Instructions*—if indeed they are people at all and not robots or computers—are not familiar with common English usage. In that respect they are like lawyers, who speak an entirely different language from the general public. The other day we read through an entire Deed, becoming more and more mystified because it seemed to be dealing with some sort of wild, greenwood outlaw gang rather than the matter in hand; we discovered later that the word Tree is legal language for Trustee, but nobody had thought fit to tell us this elementary fact.

Anyway, to return to *Instructions*, which one has to, all the time—that is the calamitous aspect of civilised life; every adjunct of it is based on the damned things. And they aren't a bit encouraging; they do nothing but threaten disaster . . .

" The earth (large) terminal (which is generally marked E or coloured green) must be connected correctly *or there will be risk*

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of serious shock. Unscrew clips A-A holding grille and insert a 15-watt pigmy lamp *of the correct voltage.* Apply an oil gun to the lower arm joints where they meet the swivel axle housings. *On no account should the steering idler be overlooked as lack of care here may cause a serious breakdown.* Attach the non-reversible snap-fastener connections and place batteries under the clips provided. *On no account should any attempt be made to connect the battery leads to the wrong connectors, as serious damage to the transistors will result.*"

See what I mean? Doom lurks at every turn.

The frightening thing is the way they take it for granted that you will somehow know the correct voltage, the right connectors, and which the earth terminal is even if it isn't marked E or coloured green. Some people do know these things by instinct. Out of the world's four thousand million-odd inhabitants we don't mind betting that perhaps two hundred thousand are gifted in this way; the rest just panic when they see the words, "Study the attached chart; carefully lift out section ABCD rotating spigots E and F . . ."

A few weeks ago we happened to travel in a jet plane beside a young Arab, a student of the Humanities, he told us, who was journeying west for the first time.

You know how the intercom starts telling you about your life-jacket just when you are hopelessly wrestling with your seat-belt, trying to turn the air-conditioning away from your ear, and wondering how long it will be before someone brings a drink . . . This young man, pale and apprehensive, was studying the Chart with instructions in Spanish, Chinese, French, German and English, but no Arabic. Feeling sorry for him we pointed out the dangling string under the seat (A) which you pulled to start the whole process.

"*Pardon?*" he said. It turned out he had some verbal English and French but no knowledge of written characters, which made the chart worse for him.

"Hold the jacket over your head with flap F to the left, G to the right, slip strings D and E over your head, pull tabs B and C down behind the back, thread them through loops H and I, fasten, and make for nearest emergency exit, J and K on plan of plane. *On no account attempt to inflate lifejacket while on plane.*"

"Excuse me," he said nervously. "I think I prefer to drown."

He pulled out a copy of the Koran. Gradually peace stole over his face. We pulled out Argosy. But before settling to read we had a sudden universal vision of Heaven—milk and honey, harps and trumpets, angels and the black-eyed daughters of Paradise—but, above all, no *Instructions.*

The Back-room Boys

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He burst in like a force nine gale

THE CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER

BY E. L. MALPASS

MADE of wire wool, his whiskers were. Under the peaked cap his eyes held the washed blue of distant oceans. He carried a ditty-bag and a parrot in a cage. He walked the promenade as though it pitched and heaved beneath him.

Only two things were out of character. He was steering a push chair in which sat a small girl muffled to the eyebrows. And instead of diving into The Sailor's Arms he made a beeline for *Miss Ogwen Dainty Teas and Choice Gifts.*

Happier than any traveller in this vale of tears has a right to expect, was little Miss Ogwen Dainty Teas. For if there was one thing gave her more simple pleasure than another it was being refined. And she was like a goldfish in a bowl of refinement. Never were teas so dainty, the bread so thin, the beverage so delicately aromatic. Never were Gifts so choice, with Baby Bunnies 2s. 6d., Gay Bunnies 5s., Cuddly Bunnies 7s. 6d. ; with the Swallow Falls in tapestry, and Snowdon in poker-work; and enough godwottery pottery to sink a battleship. Never were regular customers so refined, crooking their little fingers while they drank, using their pastry forks dainty as you please, and hardly a word of Welsh between them. Oh, down on her knees every night went Marged Ogwen, thanking God for gentility. Rather see her customers stretched dead at her feet than tucking into egg and chips and reaching for the sauce bottle, that Miss Ogwen.

And it was into this haven of respectability, this spinsters' Mecca, that Captain Morgan burst like a force nine gale.

Oh, pleasant it was in the Café that afternoon. Outside, the winter wind was dragging a veil of spray across the front. The sea, cold and grey, snapped and snarled at the legs of the pier. But inside, all was warmth and cheerfulness. A dozen spinster

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ladies, sitting on rush-bottomed chairs at gate-leg tables, drinking tea from folksy pottery, nibbling homemade scones, chattering as gaily as sparrows. And among them moved Miss Ogwen with her trays, beaming at the praise her teas always evoked, like a cat lapping cream.

Then, the door was flung open. In came the elements, a push chair, a parrot, and a rough seafaring man.

Askance, the regulars looked. Men were not entirely unknown in the Café. But they were usually holiday makers, rendered harmless by the presence of wives and families. This winter visitor to our shores was a very different matter.

However, the stranger sat down quietly enough, filled his pipe from a plug of vicious-looking tobacco, and began to cloud the room with acrid blue smoke. Got the regulars coughing genteel in no time. Then he intimated that he required service by banging on a plate with a spoon.

Miss Ogwen, entering with a tray of goodies, took in the situation at a glance. "Only serve afternoon teas here," she said firmly. "Get sausage and chips at the Beach Kaff, and a powerful cup."

Through the smoke haze a pair of blue eyes was regarding Miss Ogwen with an intensity that made her feel quite swimmy. "Don't want sausage and chips," the Captain said. "Just want you, Marged bach."

Well! agog, the customers were now. Hushed, the clatter of teacups. You could have heard a Cuddly Bunny drop.

"Who—who are you?" gasped Marged Ogwen.

"Just a seafaring man," he said. "Let's have tea, is it."

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Ogwen, aware of the straining ears of the clientele. "And a glass of milk for the little girl?"

"Milk be damned," said Captain Morgan. Out of his hip pocket he winkled an evil-looking flask, uncorked it, and gave it to the child, who swigged happily.

A sweet, rich aroma drifted into the room, and hit Miss Ogwen in the face like a nonconformist tract. Rum! Miss Ogwen saw ruin and degradation just around the corner. Her beloved regulars wouldn't stand for this. They would walk out as one woman.

But glued to their chairs, her beloved regulars were. Wouldn't have missed this for worlds. They were silent, terrified of missing a word.

Worse was to come. The parrot, who had been sitting quietly meditative, now swivelled his beady eye round the room, cleared his throat, and uttered into the electric silence.

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It was a word that might have been used by one of our rude, in this case *very* rude, Anglo-Saxon forefathers.

"Oh, the sweet Poll. What did he say?" asked Miss Ap Rhees, whose English didn't stretch that far.

"Never mind, Miss Ap Rhees," said Marged.

"But I want to know, dear. Always eager to improve my mind, I am."

Feeling quite faint, Marged was. But she kept her head. Briskly she handed out their bills to the regulars, turned the card on the door to *Closed*, and retired thankfully into the kitchen to get the gentleman's tea. And if I take my time, she thought, by the time I come back those inquisitive creatures will have gone.

She found she was trembling. "I want you, Marged." No one had ever said that before, in all her thirty years. One kiss was all she had ever had, and throughout her life she had kept the memory of that polished and cossetted like a piece of precious silver. No. For all her happiness, she had to admit that love had passed her by without even a sidelong glance. And if it was at last coming into her life, even in the form of a common sailor man with a push chair and a parrot, then she was going to see what it had to say . . .

She came back into the shop. Reluctantly the regulars had torn themselves away. She was alone with this poor, unfortunate widower and his child. Went out to both, her woman's heart did. She set down the tray, pushed her glasses up on her friendly little nose, patted her mousy hair, and whispered, "Who are you?"

He said, "Iestyn Morgan, who kissed you under the apple tree, and ran away to be a sailor."

"Iestyn Morgan," she said, repeating aloud the name she had so often whispered to her pillow. "Oh, there is a ghost from the past."

He did not reply. Mouth too full of cake, see.

"And the little girl," said Marged, trying vainly to get a glimpse through the blankets. "How old is she?"

"Oh, hard to say, isn't it," Captain Morgan said vaguely.

Marged poured another cup of tea, and drank it herself. Felt she needed it. But there was something she had to know. "And your dear wife. Taken from us, is it?"

"Wife?" he asked, nonplussed.

"The little girl's mother?"

"Oh." He sighed. "Died of drink in Port of Spain, she did, very tragical." He dashed away a tear.

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"Oh, there is terrible." Very moved, Miss Ogwen was. Poor, motherless child. She peered a little closer. All she could see was a pert, turned-up nose and two green eyes. "What is your name, little girl?" she asked.

"Myfanwy," said the Captain.

From what little she had seen of her Miss Ogwen would have thought the child old enough to answer for herself. She said, gently, "Doesn't say much, for her age?"

"Not a blasted word," said the Captain.

Miss Ogwen fluttered vaguely. Somehow talking to the Captain about his daughter was like driving up endless culs-de-sac. But she persevered, for she began to fear the child might suffer from some affliction. "Big for a push chair, too," she said. "Broken her ankle, maybe?"

"Both of 'em," said the Captain, swigging tea.

Getting worried, Miss Ogwen was. The blinds were drawn, the shop door locked. From the shelves the Bunnies stared, their coyness frozen into something sinister in the lamplight. Outside, she knew, the dusk had seeped into the little town, the lights burnt low on the jetty, in the darkness the waves crawled, quick and furtive as snakes among the pebbles. And here she was shut in with a seafaring man who seemed to be settling down for the night. "Be getting along now, is it?" she asked hopefully.

"Forgot to mention it," said the Captain. "Come for bed and breakfast, we have."

Too late Miss Ogwen remembered that her board, in addition to teas and gifts, advertised bed and breakfast. "Only got one room, twin-bedded," she said.

"Suit us fine," said the Captain. "Be staying quite a time, maybe."

The parrot began to sing an unbelievably coarse version of *Lead, Kindly Light*. Miss Ogwen wrung her hands. A bull in a china shop was nothing compared to Captain Morgan in a tea house. He would empty the place in a week. And if he didn't, that infernal bird would. On the other hand, he was still Iestyn Morgan, who had kissed her under the apple tree.

She said, "Might put you up for a few days, Mr. Morgan. While you look round for something else."

The Captain rose. "Now, Marged, wouldn't be turning your childhood sweetheart out into the snow, would you?" He leaned forward.

She found herself looking into the depths of those smiling blue eyes. Quite weak, she felt, knowing that for the second time in

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her life she was about to be kissed. She closed her eyes. "Iestyn," she whispered, as she wound her arms about his neck. "Iestyn, my love. Oh, come back to me, you have, across the years."

And so it began. Winter had closed about the little town, with the spume blowing across the battered esplanade, and the flag on the Beach Kaff tearing itself to shreds.

And there was Miss Ogwen the following afternoon, cowering in a shelter on the front and wrestling with her problem. For the Captain was a problem. Refinement was the keynote of her business. But a few weeks of Captain Morgan, and the Café would have about as much refinement as a dockside tavern. Miss Ogwen shuddered. And yet—and yet— He had kissed her last night, and her knees had turned to water. After all, profits weren't everything. It was love, she had read somewhere, that made the world go round. She made her decision. "The hell with refinement," Miss Ogwen whispered to the winter wind.

And there *was* the Captain, coming down the prom, push chair in front of him, tacking into the wind, pipe clenched between his teeth, putting up more smoke than a dirty British coaster in the mad March days. He saw Miss Ogwen, hove to, and sat down beside her.

Miss Ogwen touched his hand fondly. "Ought she to be out in this weather, poor little thing?"

"Do her the world of good," said the Captain. "Just taken her for a swim."

"But—" Horrified, Miss Ogwen was. "But it is November. Be catching her death, she will."

"Not her." He handed the rum flask to his daughter. "Tough as old boots, she is."

Miss Ogwen's maternal instinct was forcing itself, like a vigorous plant, through the heavy paving-stones of her gentility. She said, "Captain Morgan, you have simply no idea of bringing up children. No idea at all." She gave his hand an admonitory tap. "What that child wants is a mother."

Shot her a sidelong glance, did the Captain. Then he sighed "Ah, if only I could find someone willing to accept that onerous post."

Edged a little closer, Miss Ogwen did. She slid her arm into his, took off her plastic rainhood and laid her head on his shoulder. "Be letting *me* try, Iestyn Morgan?" she whispered.

He looked at her in gratitude and love. Then he put his

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strong arm about her waist. " Oh, Marged, that is what I have been longing to hear." He blew his nose loudly. " Come into harbour at last, my little Myfanwy and me."

Cold it was in the kitchen, the following morning, with the frost patterns etched deep and beautiful in the windows, and outside the air dank and still. But Miss Ogwen's heart, as she made herself an early cup of tea, was warm and singing as merrily as the kettle. She, who until recently had thought herself doomed to spinsterhood, had gained a gallant husband and a sweet little daughter. And she just couldn't wait for them to come down. She would take them a tray of tea . . .

" Come in," cried the Captain at her timid knock.

She went in. " Brought you some tea," she said shyly.

" Oh, there is thoughtful." The Captain sat up in bed, revealing to the blushing Miss Ogwen *Mabel* with roses on one arm, *Lucy* with an anchor on the other, while a three-masted barque sailed for ever across the tangled deeps of his bosom. Lowered her eyes modestly, did Miss Ogwen. But Myfanwy was also sitting up in the other bed, and for the first time Miss Ogwen got a clear view of her future step-daughter.

The face was delightful; pale and round and mocking, framed in golden hair. But it was what went on below the face that was intriguing Miss Ogwen.

The Captain, stirring his tea, read her mind. " Well developed for her age, the child is," he muttered.

" Yes, indeed." Overcome with embarrassment, was Marged.

The Captain turned to his daughter. " Cover yourself, good girl," he said. "Brought up proper, Miss Ogwen was."

Dutifully, Myfanwy pulled up the bedclothes. And Marged thought, It's no good. Have to speak to the Captain, very serious. 'Tisn't *nice* for the poor child, sharing a room with her da. Really, these men . . .

And then—all such thoughts were driven far from her mind. For she looked again at her future step-daughter. And at what she saw now she flung her gentility to the winds and let out a scream like the Holyhead Express approaching a tunnel. Looked again. Screamed again. And just went on screaming.

For Myfanwy, in pulling up the bedclothes, had disarranged them at the foot of the bed and revealed, not two pretty little feet ; but a large, scaly, fishy swishy tail.

Oh, very distressing it is for a well-brought-up maiden lady to find herself within striking distance of becoming step-mother to a mermaid.

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"But—but why didn't you tell me?" she was sobbing an hour later in the kitchen.

Rubbed his chin with the stem of his pipe, that Captain. "Just a natural delicacy on my part," he said, rather hurt.

Miss Ogwen sobbed more loudly. "Don't believe she *is* your daughter."

Oh, very shocked the sailor was at that. "Well, there is a thing to say. Married Christian to her mother I was, by a fellow Captain."

Marged lifted her tear-stained face. The Captain said reassuringly, "Half human the girl is, anyway. Better than nothing, isn't it."

"Don't see why," sniffed Marged. "Seems to favour her mother from the waist down, unfortunately."

A bit helpless, the Captain looked. Put his hand on Miss Ogwen's bowed head. "Won't make any difference to—us, this?" he asked piteously.

"Any *difference*?"

"Thought she might help in the Caff," said the Captain, sucking at his pipe.

"Yes, indeed." Oh, very cutting Miss Ogwen sounded. "Can just see her carrying a tray, balanced on that scaly appendage of hers."

"Try her behind the cash desk, maybe?" suggested the Captain, not very hopeful.

Silence. Took a deep breath, did Miss Ogwen. Much as she regretted it, the time had come to be brutally frank. She said, "Captain Morgan, I have a respectable and thriving business." She swallowed. "I realised you, with your cut plug and your parrot, might have a deleterious effect on profits. But I was willing to risk that because—I loved you, Iestyn." She dabbed her eyes. "But a mermaid, no. Financial suicide, it would be. Besides—" Marged had determined to be brutally frank, hadn't she—"smells of fish, the girl does. Noticed it the moment I came into your room this morning."

The Captain's turn to be angry, now. Banged the table with his fist. "'Twasn't my daughter smelled of fish, Marged Ogwen. 'Twas the crate of herrings under the bed."

"H-herrings?" cried Marged faintly.

"Her staple diet," said the Captain.

"But how do you cook them?" Visions of a primus setting the curtains alight now.

"Don't need to cook them," said the Captain. "Eats 'em raw, the girl does."

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It was too much. "Captain Morgan," Marged said, "I must ask you and your daughter to find other accommodation." She rose. "Today, if you please."

The Captain said coldly, "Very well, Miss Ogwen. If you insist. Plenty of boarding houses on the front." He rustled his whiskers with his huge paw. "Might try Mrs. Edwards Afon Wen," he said, very thoughtful.

Paled, Miss Ogwen did. When it came to an efficient news service, the BBC had nothing on Mrs. Edwards Afon Wen. Once let *her* get hold of their guilty secret— She put her hand on the Captain's sleeve. "Mustn't be over hasty, must we, Iestyn dear," she said softly.

So Captain Iestyn Morgan and Miss Marged Ogwen went to Bethel and were married tidy. And Marged moved into the bed and breakfast with the Captain. And Myfanwy moved into the bathroom, where she settled down for the winter quite happily, combing her locks and munching herrings like so many bananas.

But very harrowing the story of Marged Ogwen becomes now. As in so many tragedies, the first signs were almost negligible.

One day, for instance, the Captain said he would take a turn as far as the lighthouse before dinner. Five minutes later, his bride, watching him fondly from the window, saw him take a turn into The Sailor's Arms. Dinner was late that day, the Captain coming home five minutes after closing time, merriment bubbling under a thin crust of solemnity.

"Nice fresh breeze at the lighthouse, was it?" the unhappy Marged asked.

"Oh, blowing great guns," said the Captain, eyes fixed on the steak and kidney. Then he giggled, for no apparent reason.

Why, thought Marged, why does he have to lie to me? She said timidly, "Saw you going into The Sailor's Arms, Iestyn."

Terrible then the change that came over the mariner. Glowered at her from under lowering brows. Slowly he rose, his fingers closing about the cheese knife. "Teach you to spy on me," he roared.

Rooted to the spot, his wife stood. Then, as suddenly as it had come, the Captain's mood passed. He laughed, tossed away the knife, stood swaying slightly and gazing appreciatively at both his bride and the steak and kidney. Then, to her immense relief, he turned his attention to the latter.

But after that, dinner was late most days. Sometimes, indeed, the Captain would come in roaring and hiccuping in the middle of afternoon tea, frightening the regulars out of their wits. And, as

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was to be expected, trade began to decline. The more timid ladies felt that, if they had to choose between the juke box at the Beach Kaff and the drunken sailor at Miss Ogwen Dainty Teas, they would choose the juke box every time. At least it didn't breathe rum into your face.

In vain did Marged plead with her husband. In vain. The Captain took to rising later, staying out longer, and coming home drunker. The dwindling business was having to support three instead of one. The Captain's demands for money became more and more excessive. Thrown away his sheep's clothing the wolf had now, and no mistake.

Oh, bitterly did Marged upbraid the fate that had brought the Captain to her door ; even more bitterly her own folly in admitting him. Until, one dreadful day, returning laden from a visit to Evans the Fish, she found the till broken open, the Captain gone, and water pouring through the Café ceiling . . .

By now, spring had come to the little resort, surging up the estuary, leaping up the rocks in the March winds ; with the sea changed from gunmetal to joyous blue, and the pier and the prom gay with silver paint, and all the shops blossoming pretty with beach balls and buckets, postcards and bathing-wraps, and the beaches a-crawl with crabs and toddlers.

Oh, a terrible disturber of the blood, that old spring. Not surprising that it had touched even Myfanwy's fishy heart, so that headstrong child turned on both taps and flooded the bathroom to a depth of three feet. Splashing happily she was, when a horrified Marged burst in and confronted her step-daughter. The poor little woman looked into those mocking green eyes. And something snapped. Marged fetched the push chair, stuck her wriggling step-daughter in it, shoved her to the end of the pier and tipped her over. Then she came home and sat by the ravaged till, waiting for the Captain . . .

Always went to kiss his daughter goodnight, the Captain did—but on this occasion coming back from the bathroom wild-eyed: " Where is Myfanwy ? "

Surprised, Marged was. " Not in the bathroom, is it ? "

Oh, upset proper, the Captain was, claiming that blood, even a mermaid's, was thicker than water, and off to the Police Station to report his loss. Very sympathetic, the Sergeant was.

" Can you describe your daughter, sir ? "

" Green eyes, golden hair, and a fish's tail," said the Captain.

Put two and two together, the Sergeant did, got the wrong answer, and locked him in the cells to sober up.

But the next day back the sailor came to the Café, and a solicitous

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Marged. "Oh, neither sight nor sound is it, bach? Well, there is distressing."

Teatime, and the small band of faithful customers gathering, and the Captain forlorn in his corner.

But then, what is this? Megan Williams bursting in, very distraught. "Oh, there is shameful. Sitting in a rock pool. Ought to go to prison . . ."

Drew her chair up closer did Miss Ap Rhees. Eyes starting from her head. "Oh, not one of those topless, is it?" she whispered, shocked to the core and enjoying every second.

Miss Williams nodded, eyes closed, mouth a thin pink line. The Captain took his telescope and went out without a word.

Not back till dusk. Then, rushing in: "Money. Money. Quick. On Seal Island, she is. Got to hire a boat and get her off before the tide covers the island." He wrenched frantically at the till.

"Come with you I will," said his good-natured wife, struggling into her plastic mac. "Help with the rowing, maybe."

Darkling it was as they pulled out to the island, with the tide rolling in fast, swirling and sweeping into the estuary, and the bulk of Seal Island black before them. The tide had not yet covered the little beach. They ran the boat's nose on to the sand. The Captain leapt ashore. "Hold her there," he cried. "Be back in five ninutes." He scrambled off over the wet rocks.

Marged watched him go. Then calmly she seized an oar and pushed off. Calmly she rowed back to the harbour. Calmly she tied up the boat and went home.

Quiet and peaceful it was in the little café. She carried the parrot into the kitchen. She could deal with him later. Calmly she made herself a cup of tea, sat sipping it thoughtfully, surrounded by her dear Bunnies and all the symbols of her gentle way of life. She glanced at the clock, then checked on the tide-tables. By now, she decided, Seal Island would be about six feet below the surface. She yawned, and went upstairs to the virgin comfort of her old room. A hard day's work lay before her tomorrow.

And by teatime the following day all traces of the Captain had been removed. The tables were laid, the kettle was boiling, little Miss Ap Rhees was putting her head nervously round the door and saying, "The Captain out, is it?" before she edged in.

And Marged, cutting a wafer-thin slice of bread and butter, looked up and smiled a welcome. "Come in, dear," she said. "No need to be afraid." She started on another slice. "Gone back to sea, the Captain has," she added truthfully.

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" George, there's a spider in the bath."

Cartoon by **MENDOZA**

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"I want the girl, don't you understand"

TERROR OF ROME

BY ALBERTO MORAVIA

I had such a longing for a new pair of shoes that often I used to dream about them during that summer, as I lay in the basement room where the porter of the building hired me out a camp-bed for a hundred lire a night. Not that I was really going barefoot; but the shoes I was wearing had been given me by the Americans, and they were light, flimsy shoes, and by this time they hardly had any heels left, and one of them was broken through at the little toe and the other had stretched so much that it kept on coming off and looked like an old slipper. I managed to stave off hunger, more or less, by selling a few things in the black market, by carrying parcels and doing commissions; but I never succeeded in putting aside the money for the shoes, for which some thousands of lire were still needed.

These shoes had become an obsession with me, a black speck hanging in space which pursued me wherever I went. It seemed to me that I could not continue to live without some new shoes, and sometimes, so depressed was I at being shoeless that I went so far as to think of killing myself. As I walked along the street I looked at nothing but the feet of the passers-by; or else I would stop in front of the windows of the shoemakers' shops and stand staring in wide-eyed wonder at the boots and shoes, comparing their prices, shapes and colours and choosing, in my mind, the pair that would suit me best.

In the basement room where I slept, I had made the acquaintance of a certain Lorusso, who was an outcast like myself—a chap with fair, curly hair, thick-set but not so tall as I am; and I realised that I envied him simply because he, by some means or other, had managed to procure himself a really fine pair of lace-up boots, of thick leather with hobnails and double soles, of the kind that the Allied officers wore. These boots were too

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big for Lorusso, and indeed, every morning, he used to stuff them with newspapers to keep them on his feet. On the other hand they fitted *me* like a glove, since I was taller than he was.

Now I knew that Lorusso, too, had a great longing: he wanted to buy himself a shepherd's pipe, an instrument which he was able to play because, before coming to Rome, he had been with the shepherds up in the mountains. He said that, with his small size and fair hair and blue eyes, with his wind-jacket on and his Allied soldier's trousers tucked into his Allied soldier's boots, and his pipe between his lips, he felt he might be able to go round the restaurants and earn a lot of money playing the shepherd's tunes he knew, and a few others as well, which he had learnt when he was acting as messenger-boy for the Americans. But the pipe would cost a lot of money, just as much as a pair of shoes or even more; and Lorusso who, like me, plied all sorts of trades, never had the money to buy it. He thought a great deal about his pipe, as I did about my shoes; and, without saying anything, we had reached an agreement: first I talked to him about the shoes and then he talked to me about the pipe. But it was all nothing but words and we never managed to procure ourselves either pipe or shoes.

At last we came, by mutual agreement, to a decision; or rather, it was I who thought of it and Lorusso at once approved it as though he had never thought of anything else in all his life. We would go to some lonely spot frequented by lovers—the Borghese Gardens, for instance—and there we would carry out an attack upon one of those loving couples who seek secluded spots for undisturbed hugging and kissing.

I discovered then, to my surprise, that Lorusso was a bloodthirsty young man—a thing I would never have believed from his innocent shepherd-boy appearance. He began saying, immediately, with enthusiasm, that he felt like bumping off our victims, both woman and man; and he kept repeating that expression bumping off—which he had picked up goodness knows where—with the greatest gusto, as though he could already see the moment when he would bump them off in earnest.

At one point, indeed, as if to show me how he would conduct himself, he actually threw himself upon me and seized me by the collar, pretending to rain blows upon my head with a heavy iron spanner that he possessed, "I'll give it him like that . . . and that . . . and that . . . until I've bumped them off, both of them."

Now I myself have very bad nerves, because I lay for a night and a day in a cellar beneath the ruins of my home in my native

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village, after an air raid, and ever since then I have had a tic which causes my face to twitch constantly, and the slightest thing makes me lose control of myself.

So I gave Lorusso a violent push which sent him sprawling against the basement wall, and I said, "Keep your hands to yourself . . . If you touch me again, I swear I'll take that spanner and bump you off once and for all." Then I recovered myself and went on, "You see what an ignorant fool you are? You don't understand anything, you're as dumb as an ox . . . Don't you know that couples who make love out of doors do it because they don't want anyone to know? Otherwise they'd do it at home. And so, if you take their money, they won't report you because they're afraid that a husband or a mother will get to know they've been making love . . . But if you bump them off, the newspapers will start talking about it, everyone will get to know, and in the end the police will catch you. No; the thing to do is to pretend to be a couple of plain-clothes policemen: 'Hands up, you're kissing in a public place; don't you know that's forbidden? You're breaking the law . . .' And, with the excuse that they're breaking the law, we take their money and off we go."

Lorusso, who is extremely stupid, gazed at me open-mouthed, his round, china-blue eyes staring out under the hair that grows halfway down his forehead.

At last he said, "Yes, but . . . but dead men tell no tales." He said it quite without expression, just as when he said, "I'll bump him off," like a parrot; goodness knows where he had heard the saying.

"Don't be a fool," I replied. "Do what I tell you and keep your mouth shut."

He made no further protests, and we came to an agreement about our plan.

On the day fixed, we went off in the evening to the Borghese Gardens. Lorusso had the spanner inside his wind-jacket, and I had a German pistol in my pocket which I had been given to sell, but I had not yet found anybody who wanted it. As a precaution I had unloaded it, thinking that either our attack would be immediately successful or, if I found it necessary to shoot, it would be just as well to give it up altogether. We started off down the avenue that runs beside the riding-track, and here every seat had its couple, only there were lamp-posts and people passing, just as in the streets. We turned out of this avenue into the one which leads to the Pincio, one of the darkest

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places in the Borghese Gardens; loving couples like it also because it is convenient to the Piazza del Popolo. Here it was really dark, owing to the trees and the scarcity of lamp-posts; and the couples on the seats were beyond counting. There were even two couples on one seat, sometimes, each carrying on regardless of the other, kissing and hugging, quite unashamed at being seen by the other two who were doing the same thing.

Lorusso seemed now to have forgotten his desire to bump people off, for he was made like that and changed his mind very easily; now, seeing all these couples kissing, he began to sigh, his eyes shining and his face filled with envy. "After all, I'm young, too," he said, "and when I see all these lovers kissing, I tell you straight, if I wasn't in Rome but in the country, I should frighten the man so much that he'd run off, and then I'd say to the girl: 'Come on, my beauty, come along, my beauty, I won't do you any harm. . . Now come along, my dear, come with your little Tommaso.'"

He walked down the middle of the avenue, at some distance from me, turning to look at the couples in a most shameful way and licking his lips with his big red tongue, just like an ox; and he wanted to make me look at the couples too, and notice how the men put their hands under the women's dresses and how the women clung to the men and allowed them to put their hands on them.

"What an idiot you are!" I answered. "Do you or do you *not* want that pipe?"

He twisted round to look at one of the seats and replied, "What I want now is a girl. . . Any girl would do; that one for instance."

"In that case," I said, "you oughtn't to have brought your spanner and come with me."

"I almost think I'd have done better not to," he answered.

He talked like that because he was frivolous and changed his mind every minute. As we walked round the Pincio he had had a few glimpses of bare feminine leg, he had seen a few kisses and squeezings, and this had sufficed to make him feel that he was dying with longing to make love to someone. I myself, on the other hand, am not easily distracted, and when I want a thing, it has to be that thing and nothing else. Well, I wanted the shoes and I had made up my mind to get them that same evening, at all costs.

We wandered about the Pincio for some time, from one avenue to another, from seat to seat, past all the white marble busts set out in a long row in the shadow of the trees. We could

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never find exactly the right place because we were always afraid that other couples nearby would see us ; and Lorusso, as usual, was again becoming inattentive. It was no longer love that he was thinking of now but, for some reason, the marble busts.

" Who are all these statues ?" he suddenly demanded. " I should like to know who they are."

" You see how ignorant you are," I answered, " They're all great men . . . Since they're great men, statues have been made of them and they've been put here."

He went up to one of the statues, looked at it and said, " But this is a woman."

" You can see she was great, too," I replied.

He did not appear convinced, and finally asked, " Well then, if I was a great man, they'd make a statue of me ?"

" Of course they would . . . but you—you won't ever become a great man."

" How d'you know ? Suppose I became the Terror of Rome . . . If I bumped off lots of people, and the newspapers talked about me, and they never found me—then they would make a statue of me too."

I started to laugh, even though I didn't want to, because I knew where he had got this idea of becoming the Terror of Rome. We had been, some days before, to see a film which was called, in point of fact, *The Terror of Chicago.*

" No," I answered, " you don't become a great man by bumping people off. How ignorant you are ! . . . The great men are the ones who didn't bump anybody off."

" What did they do, then ?"

" Oh well, they wrote books."

He looked uncomfortable at these words, because he was almost illiterate, but at last he said, " All the same I should like to have a statue. . . It's quite true, I *should* like it. In that way, people would remember me."

" You're an absolute idiot," I told him, "but it's no use my trying to explain, it would just be a waste of time."

Well, we wandered round a little longer and then went on to the terrace of the Pincio. There were a few cars there and the people had got out of them and were admiring the panorama of Rome. We too went forward to the edge of the terrace: from there you could see the whole of Rome, looking like a huge black, burnt tart, with numbers of cracks of light in it, and each crack was a street. There was no moon, but the sky was clear and I pointed out to Lorusso the silhouette of the dome of St. Peter's, black against the starry sky.

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" Just think," he said, " if I was the Terror of Rome . . . all those people, in all those houses, would be thinking of me and worrying about me all the time, and I "—at this point he made a gesture with his hands as though he wanted to threaten the whole of Rome—" every night I should go out and bump somebody off and no one would find me."

" You're a perfect fool," I answered, " and you oughtn't ever to go to the pictures . . . In America they have tommy-guns and cars and they're organised, they're people who take the job seriously . . . But who are you ? Just a shepherd brought up on butter-milk curd, with a spanner inside your wind-jacket."

After some moments of offended silence he said, at last, " It's a fine view, there's no denying it, very fine indeed . . . But I quite understand, this evening we do nothing; we just go home to bed."

" What d'you mean ?" I asked him.

" I mean that you've cooled off and that you're afraid." He always behaved like that : his mind became distracted, he thought about other things, and then he put the blame on me and accused me of being a coward.

" Come on, you fool," I answered, " I'll show you whether I'm afraid or not."

We started off down a very dark avenue leading right along the parapet that overlooks the Muro Torto road. There were benches and plenty of couples here too, but I realised that, for one reason or another, there was nothing to be done here and motioned to Lorusso to keep on. At one point we saw a couple of lovers in a really dark and lonely spot and I almost made up my mind, but at that moment two mounted policemen went past and the lovers, fearing to be seen, disappeared. And so, following the parapet all the time, we reached that part of the Pincio that overlooks the Muro Torto bridge. There is a pavilion there, surrounded by a laurel hedge reinforced with barbed wire. At one side, however, there is a little wooden gate which is always open. I knew this pavilion from having slept there on various nights when I had not had the money even to pay for the porter's camp-bed. It is a kind of greenhouse, with panes of glass on the side looking towards the bridge, and inside it they keep gardening tools and flower-pots and also a number of marble busts that have had their noses or heads broken by small boys, with a view to their being repaired.

We went over to the parapet, and Lorusso sat down on it and lit a cigarette. He sat there, balancing himself and smoking with an impudent air ; and there came over me, at that moment,

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so strong a dislike of him that I thought seriously of giving him a push and knocking him over the edge. He would have fallen about a hundred and fifty feet and would have been smashed like an egg on the pavement of the Muro Torto road, and then I should have run down and taken those lovely boots that I was so envious of. At this moment I was furious, because I realised that for an instant I had deceived myself into feeling so violent a dislike for Lorusso that I could have killed him; whereas, on the contrary, the real reason behind it was still those accursed boots, and it was all the same to me whether it was Lorusso or someone else, provided I got the boots.

But perhaps I might really have pushed him over, for I was tired of wandering round and he was getting altogether too much on my nerves, if it had not been that fortunately, all of a sudden, two black shadows passed close beside us, almost touching us—two interlaced shadows, a pair of lovers. They passed right in front of me ; the man was shorter than the woman, but owing to the darkness I could not see their faces. At the gate, the woman appeared to be resisting, and I heard the man murmur, " Let's go in here."

" But it's dark," she replied.

" What does that matter ?" he said.

Anyhow, in the end she gave in, and they opened the gate, went in, and disappeared into the enclosure.

Then I turned towards Lorusso and said, " That's just what we want. They're gone into the greenhouse so as to be quiet. . . What we now do is to present ourselves as plain-clothes policemen; we pretend we've caught them breaking the law and we take away their money."

Lorusso threw away his cigarette, jumped down from the parapet and said to me, " All right ; but *I* want the girl."

I was flabbergasted, and asked, " What d'you say ?"

He repeated, " *I* want the girl . . . don't you understand? Anyhow, that's what *I* intend to do."

Then I understood, and I said, " But what d'you mean, are you crazy ? . . . Plain-clothes policemen can't do that kind of thing."

" Whatever does that matter to me ?" he said. He spoke in a curious, strangled sort of voice, and although I could not see his face I knew from his tone that he was serious.

I answered resolutely, " In that case we won't do anything."

" Why not ?"

" Because I say no. . . I won't allow women to be treated like that."

" And supposing I want to ?"

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" In that case I'll hit you, I swear I will." There we were, standing close to the parapet, our noses almost touching as we quarrelled.

He said, " You're a coward."

I replied, dryly, " And you're a fool."

Then, in a fury because I was preventing him from giving vent to his desire for a woman, he said all of a sudden, " All right then, I don't touch the girl . . . but as for the man, I'll bump him off."

" But *why*, *why*, you damned fool ?"

" It's got to be that—either the girl or the man."

Meanwhile time was passing and I was chafing because an opportunity like that might never occur again, so in the end I said, " All right . . . if it's necessary. But it's to be understood that you bump him off only if I make a movement like this "—and I passed my hand across my forehead. Goodness knows why—perhaps because he was utterly stupid—Lorusso immediately accepted this and answered that he agreed. I made him repeat the promise that he would not move unless I gave him the signal, and then we pushed open the gate and followed the others into the enclosure.

On one side, against the parapet, stood the little tramcar which, in the daytime, drawn by a small donkey, takes children for rides along the avenues of the Pincio. In the corner, between the parapet and the gate, was a lamp-post which threw its light across the enclosure and through the panes of glass right into the greenhouse. Inside the greenhouse you could see rows and rows of flower-pots tidily arranged according to size and, behind the flower-pots, several of those marble busts standing on the floor, looking very odd in their whiteness and stillness, like people appearing out of the ground from the chest upwards. For one moment I could not see the lovers ; then I espied them at the far end of the greenhouse, away from the light. They were in a dark corner, but the girl was standing partly in the ray of light from the lamp-post, and I could see who it was from the white hand that she allowed to trail inertly, while they were kissing, against the dark background of her dress.

I pushed open the door and said, " Who's there ? What are you doing here ?"

The man came forward at once, in a decisive manner, while the woman remained in the corner, hoping, perhaps, not to be seen. He was a short young man, with a big head and hardly any neck, and his face was puffy, with prominent eyes and protruding lips. He was full of assurance, as I saw immediately, and not at all

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attractive. Automatically I lowered my eyes to his feet and looked at his shoes and saw that they were new ones, of just the kind I like, American in style, with crêpe-rubber soles and moccasin-type stitching. He did not appear at all frightened, and this irritated me so that my face twitched more violently than ever. "And you," he inquired, "who are you?"

"Police," I replied. "Don't you know that kissing in public places is forbidden? You're breaking the law. . . And you, Signorina, please come forward. It's no use your trying to hide."

She obeyed and came and stood beside her friend. She was, as I have said, slightly taller than he, slim, with a tight bodice and a black, bell-shaped skirt that came halfway down to her ankles. She was pretty, with a Madonna-like face and long black hair and large black eyes, and she looked a very serious sort of girl, with no make-up on her face, so much so that, if I had not seen them kissing, I should never have thought her capable of it.

"Don't you know, signorina, that kissing in public places is forbidden?" I said to her, in order to give some impressiveness to my part as a policeman. "Besides, for a respectable young lady like you, it's disgraceful . . . Kissing in the dark, in the public gardens, like any common prostitute . . ."

She was about to protest, but he stopped her with a gesture; and then, turning to me, he said insolently, "Well, I'm breaking the law, am I? Show me your papers, then."

"What papers?"

"Identity papers to show you're really policemen."

It flashed across my mind that he himself belonged to the police: it wouldn't have surprised me, in view of my usual bad luck. But I said to him roughly; "Not so much talk . . . You're breaking the law and you've got to pay up."

"Pay up, indeed!" He spoke briskly, like a lawyer, and you could see that he was not frightened. "Policemen, indeed! Policemen with faces like that! And he with that wind-jacket and you with those shoes! . . . Really, d'you take me for a fool?"

At this reminder of my shoes—which in truth, worn and misshapen as they were, could hardly have belonged to a policeman—I was seized with a kind of fury: I pulled out the revolver from the pocket of my waterproof and thrust it hard against his stomach, saying, "All right then, we're not policemen. . . But you hand over that money just the same and don't make any fuss about it."

Lorusso, so far, had stood beside me without saying a word,

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staring open-mouthed, like the stupid fool he was. But when he saw that I had dropped my play-acting, he woke up. " D'you understand ?" he said, flourishing the spanner under the man's nose. " Hand over your money unless you want me to crack you over the head with this."

His interference irritated me even more than the arrogant bearing of the man. The girl, when she saw the heavy iron instrument, gave a little scream; but I said to her politely—for I know how to be polite when I want to, " Signorina, don't pay any attention to him . . . he's a fool. Don't worry, no one will do you any harm. Go back into that corner over there and leave us to get on with it. And you, put away that spanner." Then I said to the man, " Come on, hurry up."

It must be admitted that the young man, however unattractive, was nevertheless courageous ; even now, when I was holding the pistol rammed into his stomach, he showed no fear. He simply put his hand into his breast pocket and took out his wallet, " Here's my wallet," he said. I squeezed it as I put it into my own pocket and could tell from the feel of it that there was not much money in it. " Now give me your watch," I went on. He slipped the watch off his wrist and handed it to me, " Here's my watch." It was a watch of little value, with a steel case. " Now give me your pen." He took the pen from his waistcoat pocket, " Here's my pen." It was a good pen : an American one, streamlined, with the nib enclosed in the holder. Now there was nothing more I could ask him for. Nothing, that is to say, except those beautiful new shoes which had struck me from the first moment. He said, ironically, " Anything else you want ?" And I, without hesitating, replied, " Yes, take off your shoes."

This time he protested, " My shoes—no ! "

And then I could resist no longer. For some time now—from the very beginning, in fact—I had been conscious of a temptation to slap that flat, unattractive face; and I wanted to see what the effect of this would be, on myself as well as on him. So I said, " Take off your shoes, come on . . . don't play the fool," and with my free hand I hit him, rather crookedly. He turned very red and then white, and I could see the moment coming when he would fly at me.

But, fortunately, the girl cried to him from her corner, " Yes, Gino, give them everything they want," and he, staring at me, bit his lip till it bled and then said, " All right then," bending his head as he spoke. Then he stooped down and started undoing his shoes. He took them off one after the other and, before handing them to me, considered them for a moment with an air of

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regret : he liked them too. Without his shoes he was really very short, even shorter than Lorusso ; and I saw why he had bought himself a pair of shoes with such thick soles.

It was then that the mistake occurred. Standing there in his socks, he asked me, " What do you want now ? My shirt too ? " and I, holding his shoes in my hand, was just on the point of replying that that was enough, when something touched me lightly on the forehead.

It was a small spider which had come down on the end of its thread from the ceiling of the greenhouse; and I saw it almost at once. I put up my hand to my forehead as if to brush it away, and Lorusso, like the stupid brute that he was, thinking that I had given the signal, at once raised the spanner and dealt the man a violent blow on the back of the head. I heard the hard, dull sound of the blow, as though he had struck against a brick. Immediately the man fell forward against me, embracing me almost, like a drunkard ; and then he slithered to the ground, his face upturned and his eyes rolled back so that you could see only the whites. The girl uttered a shrill scream and, rushing from her corner, bent over him, calling him by name as he lay motionless on the floor. To show how idiotic Lorusso was, I need say no more than that, in the midst of the confusion, he again raised the spanner and held it above the head of the kneeling girl, looking inquiringly at me to know whether he should play the same joke on her as he had played on her friend.

" Are you mad ? " I shouted at him. " Come on, let's get out." And so we ran off.

As soon as we were back in the avenue, I said to Lorusso, " Now, go slowly, just as if you were out for a stroll. You've committed enough follies for one day." He slackened his pace, and I, as I walked along, thrust the shoes one into each pocket of my waterproof.

I said to Lorusso as we went, " I hardly need to tell you what an idiot you are. Why in the world did you take it into your head to hit him like that ? "

He looked at me and answered, " You gave me the signal."

" What signal d'you mean ? . . . It was a spider that touched me on the forehead."

" How could I know that ? You gave me the signal."

At that moment I was so angry with him that I could have strangled him. I said furiously, " You're an absolute idiot . . . You've probably killed him."

Then he began to protest, as though I had slandered him. " No," he said, " I hit him with the back of the spanner, where

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there's no point. If I'd wanted to kill him, I'd have hit him with the point."

I said nothing, but I was boiling with rage and my face was twitching so badly that I put my hand up to my cheek to keep it still.

"You saw what a pretty girl she was," he went on, "I was almost saying to her, 'Come, my beauty, come along my dear.' Quite possible that she might have been pleased . . . I was wrong not to try . . ." He went strutting along in a self-satisfied way, and kept on telling me what he would have liked to do to the girl and how he would have done it, until at last I said to him, "I say, shut that beastly mouth of yours and keep quiet. Otherwise I won't guarantee . . ."

He stopped talking and we went in silence through the Piazzale Flaminio, along the river, past the bridge, and came to the Piazza della Libertà. There are seats there under the shadow of the trees, and there was no one about, and a slight mist was coming up from the Tiber. "Let's sit down here for a moment," I said, "and we can see how much we've made. . . And then I want to try on the shoes."

We sat down on a seat and, to begin with, I opened the wallet and found that it contained only two thousand lire, which we divided equally. Then I said to Lorusso, "You don't really deserve anything, but being a just man I'll give you the wallet and the watch. I'll keep the shoes and the fountain pen . . . Is that all right?"

He immediately protested, "It's certainly *not* all right . . . That's a funny way to behave. . . Where's my half share?"

I answered him angrily, "But you made a stupid mistake, and it's right that you should pay for it." Well, we argued for some time and in the end it was agreed that I should keep the shoes and that he would have the wallet, the pen and the watch.

I said to him, however, "What will you do with the pen? You don't even know how to write your own name."

"If you really want to know," he replied, "I *can* read and write; I went to the elementary school. Besides, I can always sell a pen like this in the Piazza Colonna."

I had given in because I was longing for the moment when I could throw away my old shoes and, besides, I was tired of quarrelling and my nervousness had even given me a stomach-ache. And so I took off my shoes and tried on the new ones. But I discovered, to my disappointment, that they were too small and, as is well known, there is a remedy for everything in the world except shoes that are too small. So I said to Lorusso,

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" Look, these shoes are too small for me, but they're just the right size for you . . . Let's exchange. You give me your boots which are too big for you, and I'll give you these, which are better and newer than yours."

This time he gave a long whistle, as it were contemptuously, and answered, " You poor fool . . . I may be an idiot, as you say, but I'm not quite such an idiot as that."

" What d'you mean ?"

" I mean that it's time to go to bed." He looked pompously at the young man's wristwatch and added : " *My* watch says half past eleven . . . What about yours ?" I said nothing, but I put back the shoes in the pockets of my waterproof and followed him.

We took the tram, and the whole time I was chafing at the injustice of my lot, and thinking what a hopeless idiot Lorusso was, and wondering what I ought to do to make him give me his boots in exchange for my shoes. As we got out of the tram, in our own quarter, I reopened the discussion, and, seeing that reason served no purpose, even went so far as to implore him: " Lorusso, those boots are a matter of life and death to me. I can't go on living without any. . . If you won't do this to please me, at least do it for the love of God."

We were in a deserted street, over in the direction of San Giovanni. He stopped under a street-lamp and began twisting his foot this way and that, in a conceited fashion, in order to make me angry. " Lovely boots, mine, aren't they ? They make you envious, don't they ? But it's no good your losing your temper over it ; I'm not going to give them to you." Then he started humming, " No, no, no, you haven't got 'em yet and you can't have 'em now." He just sneered at me, in fact.

I bit my lips and I swear that, if there had been any bullets in my revolver, I would have killed him, not merely because of the boots but because I could not endure him any longer. In this way we arrived at the basement where we slept. We knocked at the window ; the porter, grumbling as usual, came and opened the door, and we went downstairs to our dormitory. Here there were five camp-beds in a row. In the first three slept the porter and his two sons, young men of our own age and, in the farthest two, Lorusso and myself. The porter made us pay in advance then he turned out the light and went to his bed, while we searched for ours in the darkness and lay down.

But, once I was settled under my thin blanket, I began thinking about the boots again, and finally I came to a decision. Lorusso slept in his clothes, but I knew that he took off his boots and

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placed them on the floor, between the two camp-beds. In the darkness I would get up, I would put on his boots, leaving him my shoes, and then I would go out, pretending I was going to the lavatory, which was outside at the entrance to the basement. I thought it would be a good plan for me to do this in any case, because there was the chance that Lorusso had really killed the man in the greenhouse and it was therefore better not to remain in his company. Lorusso did not know my surname, he only knew my Christian name, and so, if he were arrested, he would not be able to say who I was.

No sooner said than done. I raised myself up, put my feet to the floor, stooped down very slowly and slipped my feet into Lorusso's boots. I was starting to lace them up when I was conscious of being dealt a violent blow: luckily I moved, and the blow, just touching my ear, took me on the shoulder. It was Lorusso who, in the dark had hit out at me with his accursed spanner.

The pain of it made me lose my head, and I jumped up and lunged at him blindly. He seized hold of me by the chest, trying to hit me again with the spanner, and we rolled to the floor together. The clatter we made awoke the porter and his two sons, and they switched on the light. I was crying " Murderer! " and Lorusso was yelling " Thief !" and the others started shouting too, and trying to separate us. Then Lorusso tried his spanner on the porter ; and the porter—a bad-tempered man whom any trifle sufficed to infuriate—seized a chair and tried to hit Lorusso over the head with it.

Lorusso took up a position at the far end of the room, his back to the wall, and, waving the spanner, started shouting, " Come on, if you dare! I'll bump you off, the whole lot of you . . . I'm the Terror of Rome!" He was like a madman, red in the face, his eyes starting out of his head.

I was so beside myself with rage at that moment, that I had the imprudence to shout, " Look out! He just killed a man, only a few minutes ago. He's a murderer!"

To cut a long story short : while we were trying to hold Lorusso still and he was yelling and struggling like a lunatic, one of the porter's sons went off and called the police; and, partly from me, partly from Lorusso, they found out what had happened in the greenhouse and arrested us both.

They took us to the police station, and all they had to do was to make one telephone call; they then immediately accused us of being the two men who had carried out the attack in the Borghese Gardens. I said it had been Lorusso, and he, this time—perhaps

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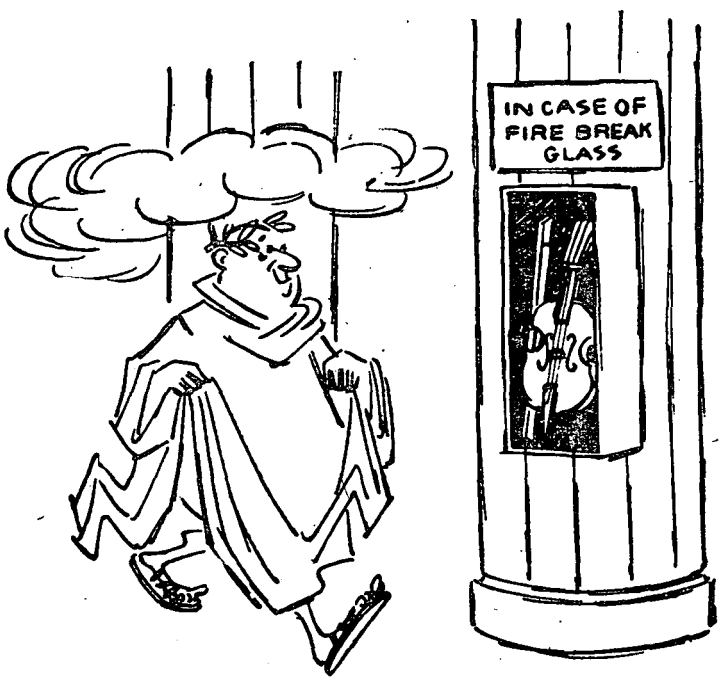
because of the way he had been knocked about—did not breathe a word.

"You're a fine pair," said the police magistrate, "really a fine pair . . . Robbery with violence and attempted murder."

But, to show you how irresponsible Lorusso was, all I need tell you is that, after a moment or two, he roused himself and asked, "What day is it tomorrow?" He was told it would be Friday. And then, rubbing his hands together, "Ah," he said, "that's good, tomorrow it's bean soup at the Regina Coeli prison."

And so it was that I got to know he had already done time, whereas he had always sworn to me that he had never been in prison. Later, I looked down at my feet and saw that I was still wearing Lorusso's boots; so I reflected that, after all, I had got what I wanted.

Translated by Angus Davidson



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Caution went to the winds . . .

TURNING POINT

BY LEE McGIFFIN

ACROSS the last of his spring term Latin exams, Professor Justin McVitty wrote, " This is too good not to be better." A delicate barb which in thirty-four years had helped produce some amazingly good doctors and lawyers.

He looked at the gold pocket watch given him on graduation and realised it was six o'clock. It wasn't the marking which consumed time. It was the students who dropped in to unroll their troubles.

Why they had always confided in him he didn't know. Engrossed with Latin verbs, a small salary and a large mortgage, McVitty had been unaware that his ruddy-cheeked face and clear blue eyes had a sympathetic quality which was an invitation to unburden the soul.

He smoothed his thatch of white hair, packed his shabby briefcase and walked briskly from the ivy-encrusted halls to his two-storey, now-paid-for colonial house.

Here he kissed his wife, Rachel, and sipped his usual glass of sherry while he addressed himself to the evening paper.

Suddenly he was eyeball to eyeball with the bleak visage of a vice-chairman, " Mr. Walter Brothers, retiring at sixty-five, received a testimonial dinner and a gold wristwatch."

McVitty didn't know Walter Brothers, but he knew for whom the watch ticked. *Frater ave atque vale!* Brother, hail and farewell!

" Rachel, I am resigning."

Rachel looked surprised. " You don't retire until next June."

" That's why I am resigning now. I do not want a dinner and a watch which shouts *out-out-out* with every tick."

" Of course, dear. We'll take a flat or live with the children."

McVitty consigned Walter Brothers to the wastepaper basket.

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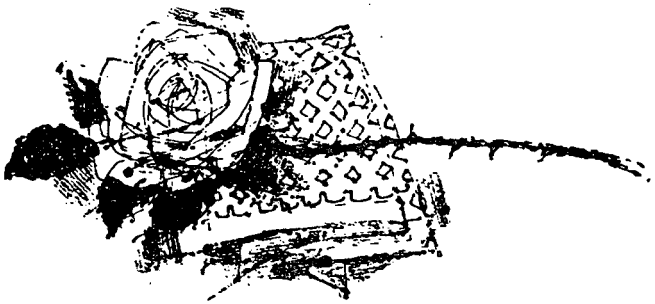

" I will not move out of my own house and I will not live with my children."

" But, on retirement pension—"

" I shall get a job in one of the electronic plants."

Since Rachel didn't remind him he couldn't even fix the power mower, he concealed the doubts which now beset him, ate his dinner, read Catullus, and got up in the middle of the night to read the Wanted ads.

At nine the next morning he delivered his resignation to Dr. Lochner, refused a rise, and repaired to the faculty club where he overheard two newly-hatched, crew-cut Ph.D.s discussing retirement. They agreed the age should be lowered to fifty, but pensions would have to be raised.

" Except for engineers or scientists none of them could make a penny outside. Take McVitty. What could a Latin professor do?"

Professor McVitty left quietly, remembering his youth.

He approached the city with the conviction there was still room for a scholar and a gentleman. The first employment agency told him there was nothing for a man of sixty-four. The second advised him to knock a few years off his age. The third was amazed that Latin was still being taught. " Now if you were on the science side—"

The next day he struck out on his own and landed a job as a shoe clerk. He was fired at ten o'clock. After that he was taken on by a florist, but when the manager discovered he knew only the Latin names of flowers, he was once more at liberty.

He rested his shattered ego in Casey Park, among old men trying to look busy and young executives practising positive relaxation. Maybe he had been too hasty. What difference did one more time-piece make? He already had one wristwatch given him by his staff when he was an Intelligence Colonel in World War II. He had another from his son and a third from his

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daughter. He took out his pocket watch and listened to it with affection.

"I haven't seen a pocket watch in years."

Mr. McVitty looked up at the man whose adamant mouth was framed with tension lines. "It belonged to my grandfather. Very accurate."

"No accuracy these days. Mistakes on the assembly line. Buck passing. I've told them to bring their problems to me but they don't."

Mr. McVitty resigned himself and listened with courtesy, not understanding a word of industrial terminology.

At last the harried talker subsided. "Sorry I bored you."

"Not at all, it was most interesting, Mr.—"

"Holland, Gunter Holland."

"I'm Justin McVitty."

"Well, thanks for the advice."

"I didn't give any. I only listened."

Gunter Holland's eyes were shrewd. "You're the only person I've met in years who really *listened.* Usually I can see a man's mind bulging with what he wants to say if I pause for breath. Why don't you come to work for me?"

"Electronics? I don't even understand the flashlight."

"I'll pay you twice your present salary."

"But, Mr. Holland, I—"

"Look, I built Holland Electronics up from nothing. Sure, I've got staff psychologists, but my employees don't go to them. A man with problems slows up production."

"I assure you that—"

"McVitty, I've got a big canteen. Report there tomorrow. Sit from ten to four, five days a week like a stranger who just dropped in."

"I doubt I would be of sufficient help to you."

Gunter Holland almost smiled. "Didn't I unload my troubles to a stranger? Something about your face makes a man take the cover off."

"Sir, I am not a spy!"

"A spy I don't need. Never repeat to me a word you hear. Don't give advice. Just let them talk. If there is money needed to mend a personal problem, spend it. I'll set up an expense account. Agree?"

"I accept your offer, Mr. Holland."

Mr. McVitty trudged towards the bus in stunned surprise.

The first morning at Holland Electronics he was convinced he had accepted a sinecure. By rosy sunset he had reappraised his

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position. He had heard about an appendicectomy, an impending divorce, a hard-nosed mother-in-law and a foreclosure.

The next week he listened to an indignant foreman. "Tell me your problems, the boss says. I tried. He won't listen. All he does is talk!"

Mr. McVitty tried to recall more of the park bench conversation but all he could remember was a wife in Europe, a son at college and a lonely house.

As the weeks passed, Mr. McVitty grew bolder in tapping his expense account. A widow on the assembly line went to the coast for ten days. A man in Dept. B had his house payments met. The son of a porter got a wheelchair.

After the second month he took his house off the market and bought Rachel a ravishing new hat.

Naturally he was caught off-guard when a dark-haired, pixie-faced girl sat down for coffee and asked his advice. "I'm Sara Courtney in public relations. I'm in love with a wonderful guy who's in love with me. It's real. But his father thinks he's too young to marry. What should we do?"

"How old is the young man?"

"Twenty-two, but his father insists he should graduate and become established first."

"His profession—could he support you now?"

Sara's eyes brimmed with pride. "He doesn't want to go into his father's business. He wants to be a commercial artist. With what I can make, we—"

Mr. McVitty shook his head. "And after the first baby arrives?"

Sara Courtney handed over a folder of drawings. "Here are some he has sold to TV, and here's our budget if I didn't work."

The sketches were amusing and fresh. The budget reminded him of Rachel's early skill with hamburger. He knew he had agreed not to give advice, but there was Sara Courtney.

Mr. McVitty succumbed. "I'd like to meet your young man. Say Casey Park at noon tomorrow?"

Not since his days in Intelligence had Mr. McVitty enjoyed a secret mission so much. He was so taken with the tall blond boy he didn't even ask if he had completed two years of Latin. He listened well and talked with his heart.

"We could wait, but we'd lose that much time being together."

Mr. McVitty felt again the loss of those precious years when he had insisted marriage must wait until he could provide security. Those years were gone now, not to be whistled back, but for Sara and Richard they were there . . .

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He threw caution to the winds. " Marry Sara, but tell your father. Ask him to the wedding. If he refuses, he needs you more than you need him."

" Thank you, sir. I'll let you know how it comes out."

Overcome with sentiment, Mr. McVitty bought some roses and took the afternoon off, only to find Rachel immersed in canapés.

" Oh Justin, I was giving you a surprise party to announce your going into business."

" But my employment is *sub rosa*."

" It isn't now. Gunter Holland came this morning and said to tell you he is so pleased with improved relations at the plant that you are now listed as Classified. No one will dare ask what you do ! He thinks you're a genius."

Mr. McVitty's conscience twinged. " Remember Sara Courtney and her Richard I told you about. I advised them to get married."

" That's wonderful." She looked down at the roses he still held. " You remembered our anniversary ! "

Justin McVitty had forgotten, but he calmly pinned the nosegay on her blouse, and kissed her.

At eight he found Sara and Richard on his doorstep.

Sara threw her arms around him. " We're on our way to the chapel ! "

Richard shook hands gravely. " I told my father we were getting married and I intended to become a commercial artist. He wouldn't listen, but at least I tried."

" And properly so. Rachel, this is Sara Courtney and Richard —we never did get around to your surname."

" I'm Richard Holland, sir. Gunter Holland's son."

Mr. McVitty realised he no longer had a job unless he stopped the marriage.

Quickly he kissed the bride-to-be and wished Richard well.

" This time," said McVitty, closing the door. " I really blew it—" just as a long car shot into the drive and Gunter Holland stormed into the house.

" *Where did they go ?* "

Justin McVitty pushed him into a chair. " For once in your life, listen ! I advised your son to marry Sara Courtney because they're in love. *Amo, amas, amat.* I love, you love, he loves. Or did you fail Latin as miserably as you failed your son ? "

" But you don't—"

" That boy took engineering to please you. He studied art at

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night. He's good. Cut him off without a penny and he'll still make it. At least he was honest with you. Yes, I broke my agreement. I didn't know he was your son, but my advice would still have been the same. Now, take that great car out of my drive. I resign."

Mr. Holland floundered to his feet. "All right, I was mad. But as soon as he left, I knew I was proud of him. It takes guts to stand up to Gunter Holland. I want to give them a house and car and—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," roared Mr. McVitty. "All he wants from you is his own father at the wedding!"

Gunter Holland started to leave, then rushed back with a small white box. "Token of my esteem. Expect you at work, Monday."

Dr. Lochner and the faculty came to the party and Mr. McVitty accepted congratulations on his new Classified job.

He was basking in a splendid haze of contentment when Principal Lochner took the floor. "On behalf of the faculty and college, in view of your meritorious service, I would like to—"

At the end of it came a gold watch.

When everyone had gone, Rachel saw the white box on the mantelpiece. "You never opened Mr. Holland's token."

Mr. McVitty tore off the wrappings and saw an expensive time-piece. "I knew the watch situation was too good not to be better."

Presently he put out the cat, and climbed into the spectacular, missile-dotted pyjamas his grandson had given him. Carefully he put on his five gold watches and went to bed.

"The time," he said, "is not nearly so late as I thought."

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THE CLOCK WITH ONE HAND

"Look at that funny clock, Dad," said Harold, "it's only got one hand."

"So I perceive," said his father.

"But how can you tell the time without a minute hand?"

"Quite easily, my boy," replied father. "From the position of the hour hand, which, at the moment, points to an exact number of minute divisions past the hour, it is obvious that the minute hand should be exactly one minute division behind it."

"I see," remarked Harold. "So it's—"

Well, what do you reckon the time was?

For baffled readers the answer is on page 167.

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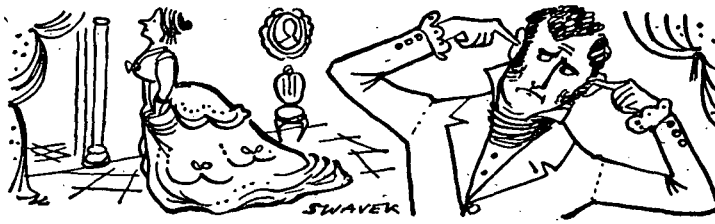

OFFENCE TAKEN

Arise, O Lord, disappoint him, cast him down . . .
Psalm XVII

Our father . . .

There were two brothers who had quarrelled, and who had an old father, who had quarrelled with both. One of them was heard by me to say that the only thing he now had in common with his brother was a wish to be able to repeat the first sentence of the Lord's Prayer with literal accuracy.

SAMUEL BUTLER, *Notebooks*

Who is my Mistris?

. . . Who ever guesses, thinks, or dreames he knowes
Who is my mistris, wither by this curse;
His only, and only his purse
May some dull heart to love dispose,
And shee yeeld then to all that are his foes;
May he be scorn'd by one, whom all else scorne,
Forsweare to others, what to her he hath sworne,
With feare of missing, shame of getting, torne:

Madnesse his sorrow, gout his cramp, may hee
Make, by but thinking, who hath made him such:
And may he feele no touch
Of conscience, but of fame, and bee
Anguish'd, not that 'twas sinne, but that 'twas shee:
In early and long scarcenesse may he rot,
For land which had been his, if he had not
Himselfe incestuously an heire begot . . .

JOHN DONNE, *The Curse*

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The Ultimate Zero

The successor to *That Was The Week That Was* bears the elephantine title of *Not So Much A Programme More a Way of Life.*

I think I can say with all the restraint that I can muster that rarely on television have I seen such an embarrassing performance.

As a mixture of pretentiousness, bathos and approved-school humour, nothing I can recall has ever been served up more calculated to make one writhe and retch. In its least offensive moments it was owlish and oafish.

The self-conscious artificers of this epic combination of facetiousness and fatuity have one consolation. No matter how they strain every nerve in their bodies and rack every cell in their brains, they cannot do worse than this.

This is the bottom and the end. This is the absolute and ultimate zero of what can be committed on the television screen.

CASSANDRA, *Daily Mirror*, 16 *November*, 1964

Clean Sweep

Eaper Weaper, chimbley-sweeper,
Had a wife but couldn't keep 'er,
Had annover, didn't love 'er
Up the chimbley he did shove 'er.

ANON

Flippin' Kids !

Robert grows very troublesome. Yet alas! what is he fit for? Yet to keep him at home—what a trial and perpetual vexation: restless, yet capable of nothing. Octavius rude from too much indulgence. Anne petted from the same cause. Laura all the disagreeable qualities of a girl just come from school. Poor me!

Laura returned in the evening from Falmouth. Rude and disagreeable . . . Octavius' propensity to perverseness must be checked. To be a parent without an assistant is a hard task. Always doing something to interrupt tranquillity.

Am discomposed with Octavius, who grows very rude and troublesome. Holidays too long.

REV. W. J. TEMPLE, *Diary*, 1796

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Action for Damages

A news writer in Holland, who had presumed to print some very severe and sarcastic reflections on Madame Maintenon and Louis IV, suffered the following severe punishment. Some months after this offence, he was induced, by a person expressly sent for the purpose, to make a tour into French Flanders. The instant he had quitted the Dutch territories he was put under arrest, and immediately, by his majesty's express commands, conducted to Mount St. Michael, then one of the state prisons of France. He was shut up in a wooden cage, comprising about twelve feet square, and twenty feet in height. Here he lived upwards of three and twenty years; and here at length he expired.

During the long nights of winter no candle or fire was allowed him; nor was he permitted to have any book; he saw no human face except the jailor, who came once every day to present him, through a hole in the wicket, with his little portion of bread and wine. No instrument was given him with which he could destroy himself; but he found means at length to draw out a nail from the wood, with which he cut or engraved, on the bars of his cage, certain fleurs de lis and armorial bearings, which formed his only employment and recreation.

DANIEL GEORGE, *An Eclectic ABC*

Scotched !

"*I do not hate the Scots, sir, neither do I hate frogs, but I'm damned if I like them hopping around my chambers.*"

SAMUEL JOHNSON

Bed Behaviour

Jone, Queen of Naples, caused her first husband to be strangled and hang'd out of the barres of his window, with a corde of Silke and golde woven with her owne hands; because in bed businesse she found neither his members nor endevours answerable the hope she had conceived of him, by viewing his stature, beauty, youth, and disposition, by which she had formerly beene surprised and abused. MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE

The End !

To hell with you. Offensive letter follows.
Irate Citizen's telegram quoted by Lord Home, Foreign Secretary, in The Wall Street Journal, July 11, 1962

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HEART OF THE DAYBREAK

—the first Bushmen gave this name to the Planet Jupiter

BY JACK COPE

SHE felt light and unbound, light as the dead leaves of the poplar tree—dropping its leaves with a shudder and the wind taking them. Some brown onions were in her apron and she held a pumpkin by its dry curled stem as she ran towards the farmhouse. Ran—her old, old feet that were bare and cracked touching the ground lightly. Not for years, not for as long as she could remember had she felt the heart to run. Now she laughed at the wind that cut through her faded dress. The goats were being shut up in the cave shelters along under the overhang of rocks and she could hear them sneeze and stutter as the goat-herd cracked his whip.

Outside the kitchen door she stopped to listen and took a long breath, smelling at the air. Then she put down the pumpkin to jerk at the wooden latch and let herself in. The kitchen took up all one end of the small, thatched house and the open hearth was like a great black hole in the wall with only a small fire in the middle. The children looked up from the fire when she came in and she stood still with her back to the door. Both children began to speak and the wind boomed in the low chimney. There was another sound, hoarse and whistling.

"He has been calling for you," the elder child said.

She put the onions and pumpkin on the table and went through to the voorhuis, her feet quick and silent on the smeared clay floor. She stopped again with her head to one side like a bird. The room had a long table and a bench and two chairs, and a shelf at the far end where the Bible was kept and a few large blue plates. A green-painted door led off to the only bedroom and she went through without knocking.

The old man watched her sternly from his bed. His head was

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propped up and his white beard lay on the blanket. He was already old when he found this place and built the house and carved the date on the lintel as the custom was—1864—and now he lay stricken.

The one small window had nothing but a wooden shutter, which was open, and the cold draught rushing through in gusts fluttered the man's white hair and beard. She went round the bed and slammed the shutter, bringing darkness. Then she lit a tallow candle and trimmed the wick and its small yellow flame shone in the old man's stark black eyes and on the bamboos of the low ceiling.

He puckered his lips and his face was strained with effort, as if he wanted to say something. She bent her head close but he only lifted his eyes, blinking slowly. The room was full of death.

"Do you want your Bible?" She spoke to him familiarly and not as a slave or servant might. He made no sign. He had used the Bible when he was strong, flung the words burning at them; at his wife long ago, at his daughter-in-law who was dead too, at Laurens his son and the two little girls. At last he did not want it. He wanted to say something to her but could not bring himself to it: something on his soul. He had left it too late, or else he was still, even now at the last hour, too stubborn to speak before his soul was torn out of him. He dismissed her with a look of his eyes and she went out back to the kitchen.

The children were trying to keep warm at the fire, huddled together on a single large plank chair. They were the same size although Rebekka, dark-eyed like her grandfather, was four years older than the fair, rosy-cheeked Annetjie. Rebekka was misshapen and had a sack drawn across her hunched back.

"Did he say anything to you, Aia Griet?" the elder child asked.

"He said nothing."

"Why are you smiling?"

Griet did not know she was smiling. She had the light feeling that fluttered in her like a madness. Joy, wildness, bliss. She wanted to take the children in her arms, to lead them out and away, far off over the brow of the world, over the endless tracks, free.

"I am not smiling."

"You are, you are!"

"How so, Bekka, when your Oupa lies there dead!"

"He's not dead, I heard him just now. He's the same as ever—I gave him his soup."

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"He's the same as ever, Aia Griet," Annetjie said, wide-eyed.

They did not believe, because it was like that with them. They went and sat on their mother's grave under the pear tree and talked to her just as though she lived, because they had not seen death. She went to a box behind the door and took out an old knitted garment. It was so large and stretched that it went easily round them both and they snuggled together. Then she piled up the fire and the dry renoster-bush twigs crackled and gave out scented smoke.

She peeled the onions, sitting on a low stool in the firelight, and she cut up some of the pumpkin and put it on to simmer with fat and some cinnamon and wild honey. The children were warm and happy and stretched out their toes. Annetjie climbed off the chair to fetch her rag doll that Aia Griet had made. It had no face, but she loved it.

Griet went out to fetch more firewood. The night would be long. The sun was somewhere low over the mountains and a bar of red light glared between the clouds, fading quickly; and the wind began to bring down thin whirls of snow and sleet that made little slushy drifts and soon melted. The wind was full of scents—the acrid saltbush and bitter-berry with its mauve blossom; goats, quiet now in the rock shelter where the walls and overhangs were painted with animals and people by the old, old ones; the smell of baboons—they would be coming close to the farm for what they could get.

Griet lifted a double armful of brushwood and staggered with it to the kitchen door. There she met the young master, Baas Laurens, who lived with the children in a green brick lean-to against the other end of the house.

"He is dead," she said.

"Dead?"

"Tonight he will go."

"Tonight?"

"I see it—he cannot talk."

"You witch, you're glad!"

"I am not glad, Baas Laurens. How can I—"

"What have you done?"

"Nothing. What can I do? Ten times I have nursed him and saved him. But now . . ." she shrugged.

"You thing! I know you!"

He stood with his back to the door, barring it against her. He smelt of horse-sweat and goats and his own sour smell, big and long-jawed with a stubble on his chin. She was afraid.

"Baas Laurens, I am making the evening meal."

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He turned at last and flung open the door. As she squeezed through with the wood she could see he too was afraid. He drew away and did not want her even to brush by him. He went off to his lean-to room, and as she busied herself in the kitchen she heard his footsteps heavy across the wind-and-rain-swept yard and later the beat of his horse's hoofs.

" Where is Father going? " Rebekka asked.

" He did not say. But he may be riding to the dorp."

" Why, Aia Griet? "

" Because his father, Baas Lukas, is dying at last."

She could not hide from them, or from herself either, the wonder of those words and they looked anxiously at her as she stirred the onion soup and raked the live coals under the pot. There was no light in the kitchen save from the fire.

" Grandfather is not dying—he always gets well again and wants his brandy," Rebekka said. " I know, Aia Griet. You can't tell me children's stories. He says it will take a six-foot yellow-snake and all its young to kill him. Oh no ! You'll die before him. You are much older."

" I am not older, little one."

" You are as old as the world," Annetjie said.

" Nearly, but not quite, my love-lamb," she laughed, showing her small firm yellow teeth. " There were things before me. Ai, but you are beautiful, my little doves."

" You're older than Grandfather," Rebekka said again.

" No, child." She shook her head.

" How can you say that ? You can't count, you don't know when you were born. You're a *thing*—a Bushman."

" True nonnetjie, but I know all the same. I was a small thing, smaller than her when Baas Lukas was a man. He was great and his head went up to the sky and he rode a black horse. He had red fire in his beard . . . " They gazed at her while she acted their grandfather as a young man astride his horse and his red beard ablaze in the sun.

She dragged up the table before the fire and set out their plates and slopped into them helpings of beans and onion soup. Then she sat in a corner of the big hearth with her back to the curve of the arch and her feet under her skirt. She watched them eat side by side and bend over the steaming plates. Annetjie's hair, yellow like the wild marigolds after rain, escaped from its braids and tapes into shining tangles; Bekka's dark hair was pulled back straight. She had a very short neck and her movements were quick and sharp. The children sucked at their spoons. With her swift hands Aia Griet broke up sticks to throw on the fire . . .

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. . . She was on the plains, and the mountains hung blue under the sky. They had killed an ox, a trek ox, and then there was meat, endless meat ; juicy red hills of food heaped on the stones and hung in the blackthorn trees and more blood than she had ever seen; the great red-blue ox-heart on a stick ready for the fire and strips of sweet-smelling tripes. The hunting men had found the ox on the old game-pan and singled it out and driven it off three days running till it dropped dead in a dry riverbed. There they slit its neck and flayed it with spear points and sharp stones. The women came down from the caves with children and half-wild dogs at evening when the fires sent out smoke of sizzling fat. They ate and danced and sang. She chewed meat till the juice ran down over her chin and dripped on her smooth pale-yellow belly and ran down between her legs. She had her strong teeth. Her mother laughed and tore her off a new strip of meat and told her to eat well and grow strong. She never before had been given a new piece before the first piece was finished . . . *Grow big, grow big like the yellow moon. Grow still and sweet as the Heart of the Daybreak.* Her mother ate until her belly stretched and shone swollen as with a new child. Her father ate too, quietly, tearing the black meat with his knife and his teeth. The best pieces were kept for him and he stayed a little apart and above them on a rock and talked with his mouth full and watched the moon rise and all the stars range over the sky—hyenas booming and groaning and the yelp of jackals beyond. They all ate, they ate well, they all were filled to the gorge and some vomited and came to fill again. They lay down under the warm star-blanket; she lay in the curl of her mother and a half chewed, half charred meat strip in her hand. The hyenas called, the wild-dogs bayed down-wind, and they did not hear. And the chafing things, the singing of the night, the sputter of thorn and renoster wood in the fires, and they did not listen.

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. . . She jumped down from the hearth. There had been a crash in the other room and she glided through, feeling her way. The candle was out and the room black-dark. The children followed and came behind her, whimpering. She felt about and found the candle and matches on the floor and she struck a light. The old-man lay still and turned his eyes to her. His one arm hung down beside the bed—in a dream or some agony of heart he had flung it out wide and knocked over the candle.

" Do you want coffee? " she said.

Faintly he shook his head. He put out his tongue to moisten

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his lips as if to speak, but his lips only trembled and no word came. His eyes found the children clinging on each side to Griet, and then he looked back at his feet and was quite still. He did not care any longer. She tucked his arm under the blankets and felt his pale, papery forehead.

The children followed her out, clinging close, and sat at the table but could not eat.

"It's nothing, my little ones," she said. "Here's sweet pumpkin with honey when you are finished."

"Can we have it now, Aia Griet?" Annetjie asked.

She could not resist her favourite and gave her a helping of the sticky sweet. "There—eat it all and you will grow nice and round like the moon. When I was little I loved to eat honey."

"Who wants to be like you!" Rebekka said.

Griet gave the older child her portion and went back to her place in the arch of the hearth. She cracked twigs nimbly and threw them on the fire and soon the flames danced up and the kitchen seemed to come alive and the moving shadows were like paintings on the wall.

"I was beautiful," Aia Griet said.

"How could you be beautiful—sies!"

"I was young then."

"When was that?" Annetjie said.

"That was then," she said and she stood up. She put her hands on her hips and swayed her slim old body, smiling. "My name is not Griet, that is not me. That is something they threw on me when they tied my hands and put a rag round me, a dress. I am Heart of the Daybreak. The star first before all others and the last to stay there. I am going towards the morning—ah, my children . . ."

"What nonsense are you babbling about, Aia Griet?"

"Heart of the Daybreak. No, that is not me, that is my mother's father that walks before the Morning Star. I am his little stick-shadow. I am on my knees in the sand when they go to hunt."

They watched her spin slowly round in the shadows, shuffling her feet and with arms raised.

Rebekka laughed. "Now she must be drunk."

"I am not drunk, my nonnetjie. When did I drink?"

"How can you talk rubbish like that? Go and see in the looking-glass. Beautiful! You're an ugly old thing. You haven't got eyes but two black slugs. Your nose is a button, peppercorns on your head—do you call that hair? And you're all wrinkles and yellow like a snake."

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Annetjie began crying.

" What's the matter with you? " her sister shook her.

" I love Aia Griet."

" Oh you—because you love anything; that silly old rag-doll with no face, and hans-bok that stinks. I love Father and—and Grandfather," she added doubtfully. " You can't love just an old Bushman."

Griet stopped dancing and came to the table. She stroked Annetjie's hair and soothed her. " Don't howl, my own, old Griet loves you, and she loves her little Bekka too and the hans-bok . . . "

" And Pietie? " she held out her doll.

" Pietie too."

" Aia Griet, you *are* beautiful."

" I was then." She looked at Rebekka and the child wrinkled up her sharp little nose. Griet walked back to the place in the hearth. She seemed different and Rebekka could not have said why. Her eyes were no longer slits of darkness sunk in wrinkled seams but were open wide. She was not humble or crouched and small but easy and possessing the firelit cave of the kitchen.

Annetjie was busy putting Pietie to sleep in a battered yellow cardboard box with a piece of dassie-skin for a kaross. Rebekka's heart beat hard in its small cage. She had heard her father often call Aia Griet a witch and now she felt afraid that there was a meaning in it. It was in some way over her grandfather. Was she drawing the life out of him—to herself? She slipped off the chair and pretended to look for her slate but she had soon glided through the dark scary voorhuis into her grandfather's still more frightening room.

Bravely, slowly, she came nearer to the bed. The candle flickered with each blow of the wind on the shutter and some dust filtered down between the ceiling bamboos. The old man lay in the yellow light with his eyes closed. He was dead! Then when she was quite near and her heart almost fluttering out at her throat, he suddenly opened his eyes and looked at her. She turned and fled back to the kitchen where the firelight danced and Annetjie on her knees was crooning a lullaby to the doll. She got on the chair and leaned back. The kitchen was quite warm by this time and the storm was shut out; it rattled at the shutters and made long sighs and moans in the chimney but could not break in.

Aia Griet found the pencil and slate and lit a stub of candle for the clever little twisted child, and she watched her write something and then begin to draw a face. She went on drawing, wet her

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finger to rub out and started again. Griet put on a kettle and built up the fire. She sat gazing at the flames. That night she would make up a bed for the children on the kitchen floor—they could not sleep alone in the lean-to. She looked from one to the other, remembering her own that she had loved, each and every one; and they were blown away like birds in the wind and she would not know them. Now she loved these two as if they were hers. The older one who fought like a wild thing shot with a poison arrow. What was this pain of the heart that went on for ever—would she be free from it before she died, the pain of loving?

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. . . The people were sleeping and the stars watched. The stars made faint sounds but they did not call out, the night was big with sleep. Before the first light, before the moon set, the horses were among them, going through like thunder and the tall men in the sky threw out fire. Her heart died in her from terror. Her father jumped on the rock and stood against the sky with his bow unstrung and he fell over silent and rolled into the darkness. Her mother found him there at daybreak with a hole in his face and a blood-pool under his head. The horses came back and the riders climbed down running among the shelters, and those who were wounded did not escape. They put a knife to her mother's throat. She was dragged from the body and her hands tied at the end of a long rope and she ran behind the horses. The one with a fiery beard and black eyes took her up on the bow of his saddle and she was carried into a new land and a new death; very small and very naked, pale yellow-brown in the arms of the rider. She never returned. She never saw the face of her people or heard her language until her memory of them was like a tree that did not grow and a waterhole of burning sand. She had borne three children to the man. Other men had used her—she loved their children but not them. Jonkman the Baster, he was her eldest child. She had gone always with the man who caught her because he was the nearest to her and there was no other. And now he was dying.

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" Aia Griet," the child looked up from her slate, " why does Father call you a witch—*heks*—that's a bad thing."

" Baas Laurens was a little baby when I nursed him on my knees. I sang over him like Annetjie sings for Pietie. He learnt from me."

" He learnt from *you*! What do you know? You can't read or write or count more than ten—listen to it! "

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" I taught Baas Laurens things in his heart he will never forget, and he knows. I taught him other things he does not know."

" Silly—how can you teach him and he doesn't know? "

" Ask Baas Laurens, little dove."

Rebekka laughed, making her pencil squeak on the slate. " He never talks to me about Bushmen. You sit there and think, but I'm not frightened of you."

" But how can you be frightened of your old Aia Griet that loves you? "

" Do you love me? "

She nodded, quiet in the corner of the hearth with the yellow firelight playing on her. Annetjie crept like a cat on to her lap and twined her arms around her neck and the tangled hair shone gold on her breast.

" You don't just love Annetjie? "

" You too, my springbok lamb."

" Maybe I love you too—a little. But not like Annetjie," she added and creased her brow seriously. " Aia Griet, I don't mind if Grandfather dies. Then my father will have everything, the house and the wagon and donkeys and horses and the goats and all the Karoo as far as a man can ride. And when Father dies they'll all be mine. I'll have gold money too and keep it in an iron box. And I'll do what I like. I'll look after Annetjie and you. And I won't ever get married. Or I might marry an Englishman. I saw an Englishman once—in Clanwilliam. I'll bury Father under the pear tree and put a flat stone on him."

She had tears in her dark bright eyes and they rolled down her face and dropped on the slate. Carefully she got down from the chair. " Now I'm going to say good-bye to Grandfather. Come with me, Aia Griet."

Annetjie was asleep, heavy and warm in her arms but Griet struggled to her feet and lifted the sleeping child. Rebekka led with the candle and Griet followed through the voorhuis and into the death room. The old man lay with his eyes closed. They could hear his breath in his throat and a small curl of froth had gathered on his beard.

" He's asleep." Rebekka put down her candle near the other, and she reached over and kissed the dry, white forehead. " Good-bye, Oupa. God forgive you—God forgive Father and me, and Annetjie."

She glanced up at Aia Griet. " Is that enough? "

" Enough, child."

But she turned back to the bed and the stern white-bearded face. " And God forgive Aia Griet too, if she has a soul."

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She took up the candle and led the way back to the kitchen, leaving her grandfather alone, with the single light, to die. Annetjie had not woken up and Griet laid her on a sack near the fire and covered her.

She went to fetch the bedclothes from the lean-to. The sharp air outside cut at her; a high moon flew in and out between the clouds. The house there like a dark hump, the almost bare poplar, the towering gouged-out rock shapes above the shelters—all seemed to be waiting, dumb and terrible, for something. She felt dizzy and she went on and groped into Baas Laurens' strong-smelling room and rolled up the children's blankets and carried them out.

She made a bed on the floor in the warmth of the fire and kissed the beautiful Annetjie and covered her up while Rebekka knelt with tightly pressed hands and prayed. She prayed for her back to be straightened by God so she could marry the Englishman, and for her mother and Annetjie and for Aia Griet to be given a place in heaven, and for the men. She had always prayed for them but she found a new difficulty because it seemed that to her mind her grandfather and father were already dead. So she asked God again to forgive them, though she did not know what for. With a shudder she wriggled in at her sister's side, into the thick sweet warmth and took Annetjie in her arms.

After what seemed a long while she opened her eyes sleepily. "Aia Griet, you can kiss me good night."

The goatherd was woken by something in the night and went out of his walled-in skerm under the hang of the old Bushman cave to see what was disturbing the goats. Nothing. He stood and looked across in the moonlight at the low outline of the house. The sky was clearing and the wind off the snowcapped mountains bitter. A thin wisp of smoke trailed from the kitchen chimney.

Aia Griet was curled in the angle of the hearth, covered with sacks and a worn fur kaross. She could not sleep. She heard the children breathing in a deep peace. The wind spoke to her in the chimney-top, and from time to time she put more wood on the fire. Maybe she dozed and woke to see a dancing yellow light in the voorhuis. What was it? She went through and came running back.

The fire was in the old man's room around the table and cloth where the candle had been, and the bed was alight and the flames reaching up to the bamboo ceiling. She shook Rebekka awake and bundled Annetjie as she was in the blankets and carried her out into the bleak farmyard. The time was nearing dawn, the

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moon had set and the stars shone clear with dark blots where a cloud here and there drifted away. They looked terror-stricken at the red slits around the bedroom shutter and it was as if a great fierce animal moved around inside. Then the thin woodwork collapsed and there was a soft growl and a rush of flame. Rebekka shrieked and covered her face, screaming over and over for her mother. The goatherd and other farm hands came running across the yard.

Aia Griet took the sobbing child and Annetjie to the goatherd's warm skerm. Annetjie had woken but fallen asleep again among the blankets, gripping the rag doll in her firm arms. Rebekka crouched in the entrance and would not take her eyes off the great blaze of the house. The heat reached them. Now the thatch was well alight and vast bursts of sparks flew up gold and red to meet the white stars. She clung to Griet and her whole small body trembled and shook. At last she let herself be put to bed and for a while she lay against Annetjie, shivering in little twitches and her teeth chattered.

Griet ran down past the house and the poplar tree and through the deep cleft in the rocks where a spring of water ran. Beyond was a small ploughed clearing and the pear tree where the graves lay, and then the Karoo stretched away to a great stone ridge and more ranges far, far into the endless half-desert. She ran on, left the pear tree behind and the ploughland and stumbled among the renoster and saltbush at the other side. She tore off the old dress and stood naked, a small copper-coloured form lost among the stones and scrub. Dawn was coming and the sky paling with mauve, like the bitter-berry flowers, and milk, and blood. The last stars remained, the Morning Star and the Heart of the Daybreak and the guide to hunters—she remembered its name in her own language, Xkoagu. She raised her arms to them, faint and seeing everything through a mist; she was stunned with happiness. She was unloosened and unbound, and herself.

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JUST ADJUSTED?

Miss Georgina P. Mathie, principal psychologist, County of Stirling, quoted the case of a nine-year-old boy who ran amok with a hatchet in the large family of which he was a member, saying, "There are far too many bairns here." She showed how, by psychological treatment, he became completely adjusted and several years later was working a guillotine in a printer's establishment.

Rosshire Journal

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I was a foreigner—an unknown quantity

MONSIEUR CLARO'S RECIPE

BY BRENDAN CONNORS

NOT many people know that Yorkshire has an empire all of its own, but I'd been brought up in wool all my life. It was no surprise when, within a fortnight of leaving the university, I found myself dispatched to Lille, the French equivalent of our West Riding. Our associates had a mill on the outskirts of Lille, so it was easier to look for digs in the village next door rather than go back to the wet-November-in-Leeds that I'd just come through.

When I got off the tram, I inquired for digs in my brand-new French. It seemed there was a room to let over the baker's in the village, halfway down the single row of shops. The little tram clanged off on its way to Belgium, and I walked down the street—if indeed you could call it a street, when one side was nothing but a field from which a crop of soggy beets had recently been uprooted.

Madame Claro, the baker's wife, accepted me after a swift cross-examination, and expertly conveyed all her reservations about me without uttering a word. I was a foreigner, an unknown quantity, an object of permanent suspicion; nothing less than half a century of paying the rent on the dot would be likely to soften that businesslike exterior.

She might—and I say this as a compliment—she might almost have been a Leeds landlady of the most respectable type. But when Monsieur Claro himself limped through the door from the bakery, dressed in a singlet, check trousers, and floury slippers, his face was as round and welcoming as his wife's was sharp and forbidding. He winked, and twitched his luxuriant moustache towards the bottle of brandy on the enormous dresser, but Madame intercepted the message, and had him back on the job before you could say cognac.

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All the same, I felt unaccountably happy. I don't know what it was, but there was something about the smell of the place . . . If you ever find yourself contemplating suicide, go and get yourself lodgings in a French bakery. I recommend it.

The housewives over there expect long crusty loaves to be produced at cockcrow every day of the year, so when I came

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back after reconnoitring the Café des Colombophiles that evening, Monsieur Claro was well launched on his regular night's work. Through the communicating door I could hear him thumping the dough and carrying on a conversation with someone whose voice was softer, and much higher in pitch than the brandy baritone of my landlord. Madame had taken her knitting to bed with her at eight o'clock, so it was not likely to be her voice I heard. At the same time, I could hardly imagine her allowing him a female assistant for the long night's work. The solution seemed obvious. Bakeries usually have baker's boys, don't they?

When I mentioned this to Madame, over my bowl of café au lait the next morning, she made French clicking noises at the back of her mouth and walked over to the dresser, where she paused a moment before turning back to me and speaking slowly and deliberately.

"There are some things which you will soon get to know, if you continue to lodge with us, monsieur. First of all, we have no young apprentice baker here!"

"But, last night I heard—?"

"You heard my husband talking to himself. Ah! Make no mistake, he is not dangerous, monsieur! But, for the past two years, he has been holding conversations with himself in the bakery. Yes. Always with himself! Quite certainly with himself, since he allows nobody else in there when he is working." Her eyes twinkled for a moment; perhaps I'd underestimated her sense of humour.

"If you are thinking that he is printing counterfeit money, or harbouring a deserter from the Foreign Legion, I must tell you that I go in there once a day, when Monsieur is sleeping, and sweep the place out. There is nothing of suspicion there. No, monsieur, my husband is eccentric, I admit. But a man who left a leg and won the Médaille Militaire at Verdun is entitled to be a little eccentric, is it not so?"

I agreed hastily, and broke off a crisp piece of croissant. It was of such absolute perfection that as long as Monsieur Claro continued to bake like that, he could sing in six-part harmony with himself all night, for all I cared. And it wasn't only the croissants either. As the days went by, my beaming landlord, artificial leg, floury hands, and bronchial wheezing, would often come through the door into the kitchen and present me with some little masterpiece of the pastrycook's art—the sort of thing he privately considered too good for his regular customers. I believe it was patriotism that impelled him to demonstrate all

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the subtle arts of France to his English lodger. In all my life I'd never tasted anything like those airy trifles, and I made a point of telling him so. We got on very well together, but I noticed that I was never allowed into the bakery itself. Not, that is, until the night of the snow.

We'd been having a good deal of trouble with a new dye-process, and I'd stayed late at the mill. The last tram had gone, so I walked back to my lodgings, a dark half mile through a swirling blizzard. My frozen fingers were fumbling for the doorkey, when I heard a faint voice coming from the tram-lines on the other side of the street. I listened: it was unmistakably a plaintive cry for help. Then I remembered that this was the day when Monsieur Claro drew a small quarterly pension for his missing leg and, bronchitis or no, insisted on making a tour of all the estaminets in the district. And there he was, sitting in the snow, with his artificial leg in front of him.

"Quickly, help me up, Monsieur Paul. I must get back and stoke the oven; it is a cold night."

"This is your pension day," I reminded him. "You do not bake tonight. Old Frappe will be baking double in the next village, as already arranged. And what are you doing on this side of the road on a dirty night like this?"

"I was making pipi," he said, with immense Gallic dignity. "Mais c'est vrai, I must get back to my oven, even though I do not bake again until tomorrow."

We had a brief altercation with Madame, who wished to lock him out for the night on the grounds that he stank of assorted liquors, but in the end I got him into the bakery, where he stoked furiously. To my amazement, he then lifted the oven-flap, and spoke into the oven.

"Not too cold for you, eh, my friend?"

Thinking he was talking to me, I was about to speak when a small voice answered him from inside the oven. It was a clicking voice, a high, metallic, inhuman little voice, but it was certainly a voice and, although I couldn't make out what it was saying, the intonation was undeniably French.

Yorkshire folk are not easily impressed, and they're not slow in the uptake either, so I soon hit on an explanation, and told him so. He was a ventriloquist, and his nocturnal dialogues were his way of keeping in practice. But he dusted the flour off the bench, reached for the cognac bottle, and sat down, wheezing.

"You do not comprehend at all, Monsieur Paul. But you are an educated man, a man who has been to the university, so I

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will tell you something that I have not told to anyone else—not even to that species of police agent I am married to."

I was bursting with questions, but hear all and say nowt is a pretty good precept for a stranger in a strange land, so I let him tell me. I was glad that I did.

"They have shown you the hole that the meteorite made in the potato field, down the road?"

They had, more than once. In that flat northern countryside, the slightest rise in the ground gets called a mountain, and the modest hole left by the meteorite was pointed out to strangers as if it were the Grand Canyon.

"The night that thing fell, I suppose I was the only man awake in the village. Two in the morning, and a sudden thump—"

"So you told the newspapers."

"Aha! But what I did not tell that rodent-faced journalist was that, a moment later, I heard a clatter in the courtyard, out here. I went and had a look, and after a bit I found a sort of little cylinder made of very hard greenish metal. Warm to the touch."

"Very dangerous; might have been a bomb!"

"I saw bombs before you were born, Monsieur Paul. This cylinder was not a bomb—it was clearly hollow. There was a sort of seam around one end, as though a lid had been fitted on there, but I could not get it open. So I tried a little trick we sometimes use when Madame cannot unscrew the stopper on a tin of metal-polish. I put the cylinder in the oven. I don't know why it loosens stoppers, but it certainly does."

"Differential expansion of solids," I murmured. My landlord beamed at this exhibition of my knowledge of physics, and awarded me another slug of cognac.

"But I never got as far as opening this sacred contraption, Monsieur Paul. Instead a little voice said, 'Thank you! Oh, thank you!' Ah, monsieur! Can you guess what a prodigious effect such an unexpected voice would have on a solitary man, at two o'clock in the morning?

"When I'd had a pretty big drink, I went back to the oven. I had to—the loaves were ready to come out. But this hallucination went on. All the time I was at the oven, the voice was telling me that all its friends were dead, and that I had saved its life by putting it so promptly into my oven. Tiens! A species of salamander, I thought; doubtless the result of this excellent brandy. But it was a real voice, because it started talking to me again, the next day, when I approached my oven in a state of monastic sobriety—the first time for years, I may say."

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I couldn't help it, and a question just popped out; I was dying with curiosity. "Monsieur Claro, get to the point! What on earth is it you have in your oven?"

"What on earth? Nothing on earth, monsieur! As far as I can make out, I have a container full of an intelligent gas. A gas which can think faster than I can; a gas which can do mathematics; a gas which can make its container vibrate like the loudspeaker on my ancient radio so that we can hear it talk."

"Intelligent organisms in a sealed container would soon starve to death," I said reluctantly, not really wishing to hurt him too much by pointing out the utter impossibility of what he was saying.

"Food; everyone needs food. You do not need to tell a baker that! But what do we need food for? Answer me that."

"To give us energy? To replace our tissues?"

"If your tissues are hermetically sealed into a canister, you do not need to replace them. And, monsieur, if you come from a distant planet, with a temperature of several hundred degrees, you do not eat food to provide energy, you just absorb heat from the atmosphere around you. And, if the vehicle you are travelling in happens to crash itself into a world which, by your standards, is as cold as the Arctic, you are very grateful if a large animal pops you into a sort of cupboard which is cosy and warm. A cupboard which, by chance, happens to be at the sort of temperature which you are used to in the home you will never see again."

The silence was so tense that it would have twanged like a harp string if I'd so much as moved. It was impossible. But, when a Yorkshireman says something is impossible, he only means it couldn't conceivably happen north of the Midlands. He's prepared to make an exception for places that are obviously foreign, like France, or the south of England. I couldn't think of any good reason why Monsieur Claro shouldn't be harbouring an exile from another planet, apart from the fact that I'd never heard of it happening before. However, I wasn't going to give in as easily as all that. I spoke up, firmly, "I don't believe it."

"Lift up the oven-flap," he wheezed, "you shall test for yourself. Interrogate my small friend. You will understand his replies, I expect; after all, his French is rather better than yours."

I ignored this palpable hit, and lifted the flap with the big wooden paddle that he used for stacking the loaves in the oven. Feeling rather silly, I asked, "Er—what is your name?" There was certainly a reply, but it was unintelligible, so I went on:

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"Where do you come from?" The answer was distinct enough this time, but it was nowhere I'd ever heard of. I didn't seem to be getting anywhere. "How far away is your home?" was the next question—I knew enough about astronomy to tell whether the answer was plausible or not.

"They do not use our ways of measuring," Monsieur Claro put in, from behind the bottle, "and the answer is so large that it doesn't mean anything to me."

"In astronomical units," I asked slowly, "how far away is your home?"

This time I understood the tinny little voice. "About three average galaxy-spacings," it said.

The baker made the usual grimace of a Frenchman who is baffled, so I explained to him. "If you could travel at the speed of light, about three hundred thousand kilometres a second, do you know how long it would take to cover three galaxy-spacings?" He obviously didn't, and when I told him that it would be a journey of a few million years, that didn't mean much to him either. He concentrated on the cognac, and left me to it, so for the next four hours I asked the disembodied voice all the questions I could think of.

The answers were often fascinating, often quite cryptic, and occasionally I was told that some particular question had no meaning for the highly-organised intellect possessed by the oven's extra-galactic inhabitant. But I learnt a lot; the metallic canister was no more than a spacesuit, and in his home planet individual organisms kept themselves from diffusion by means of surface tension. They could reproduce by splitting in two, but rarely did this, since, apart from a traumatic loss of heat, or a cosmic cataclysm, they were virtually immortal. Their interests were largely mathematical, and atomic physics was for them what biology is for us.

We were talking about molecular structures, and getting along like a house on fire, when Monsieur Claro suddenly spoke up; "That's how he helps me. He tells me the exact time to take everything out of the oven."

I asked the little goblin-voice how he did it.

"You must understand that the whole of our existence is concerned with the study of patterns, for we do not have to spend most of our time on problems of survival, as your species does. Your language, for example, is a simple pattern of communication which any of us could learn very quickly. The process which you call baking involves certain patterns of change in the structures which are placed into this oven. When I recognise

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the optimum molecular structure, I call my friend, and he removes his handiwork from the oven; it is as simple as that. Recently we have been collaborating on rather more complex structures which I have found very interesting."

"I must thank you," I said. "I found them very pleasant to eat."

The little voice became almost wistful. "Eating, and taking pleasure in eating, are things I do not understand."

"It must simplify your space-travel problems, not having to take food along. But how do you manage to keep hot? Space is supposed to be cold."

This brought a complex explanation, of which I understood rather less than half.

As near as I could make out, the migrants would prepare a hot cloud of inert gas, condense their outer layers into a hard canister, and bed themselves down deep into their cloud before setting out on their journey across the centuries. Time and distance do not present many obstacles if you do not need to eat, and are more or less immortal anyway.

"Could you make a cloud like that, in order to get back home?"

"I know how it is done, but the equipment and materials are not available here."

"What made you land here in the first place?"

"A mistake. We wished to make a temporary landfall, and selected the nearest inhabited planet—which happened to be yours. We never dreamt that intelligent life could possibly go hand-in-hand with temperatures as low as these! When we entered the atmosphere of your world, to our horror, our travelling-cloud began to solidify. It was an almost solid object that struck the surface, and it was only because the impact caused it to break into fragments that I was thrown out, near to death. And I am still near to death. Only this oven separates me from it. I must stay here for ever."

Ever is a long time, I thought, but Monsieur Claro supplied his own commentary. "He does not mind much, because they are not driven to survival, as we are. To them, death is as remote a possibility as winning the Loterie Nationale two months running! But now, Monsieur Paul, you must go to bed, or that inflexible basilisk will be coming down in search of me. You can talk to Bœuf de Conserve tomorrow, if you like."

The penny dropped as I went upstairs. The baker had christened his visitor *Bully Beef*—after all, he had arrived in a tin, hadn't he? I laughed quietly to myself in the soft embrace of the huge French featherbed, but it was some time before I

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slept. I was sure of one thing; this traveller from a distant sta should be questioned by better brains than mine. Who knew what unthought-of knowledge he could pass on to the human race?

Next morning, the facteur pedalled up with a telegram for me;

RETURN HOME IMMEDIATELY AUSTRALIAN AGENT IN HOSPITAL STEEP PRICE INCREASE PREDICTED NEW WOOL CLIP ESSENTIAL YOU DEPART SYDNEY SATURDAY DAD.

That was that; when you say wool to our family, it's like mentioning a blood-oath.

As I was packing, I tried to tell Monsieur Claro what I thought he should do with his other lodger. He heard me out, wheezed a couple of times, and twirled his great moustaches.

"He does not want that, and nor do I. He does not like our jungle of a world much, and is happy to stay in his own warm corner of it. And remember, Monsieur Paul, that I am almost as much a prisoner in the bakery as he is. My bronchitis, and my artificial leg do not permit me to go out much. Even four times a year is too much, the doctor says, although that old devil Frappe enjoys his extra little bit of profit. Come back and see us whenever you can; we liked having you. But promise me to say nothing."

I promised: there was no way of refusing. We shook hands. Madame, astoundingly, dabbed her eyes and gave me a couple of kisses. And that was that. The tram, the train, the boat, and Australia. I sent them a postcard of Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Two years later, I got my father to admit that they'd never had such far-sighted wool-buying, and browbeat him into conceding me a holiday. I was on a P. & O. boat forty-eight hours later and, at Marseilles, the Paris express was waiting. It went so fast that it frightened me, and in no time I was booking in at the Normandie and dashing out for a last minute strapontin at the Folies. A bit of decadence seemed wonderful after all that Australian wholesomeness, but I wrenched myself away next morning, and took the train from the Gare du Nord. That afternoon I found myself on the same little tram, with what seemed to be the same peasant beet-pickers, and very soon we were clattering down the village street.

There was a new sign over the baker's. It said:

ARISTIDE LUCHON—RADIO TELEVISION

and, in the window, instead of long crusty loaves of the finest bread in the world, there was a very smart display of record-players.

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I took myself to the Café des Colombophiles, where young Henri fell on my neck. We had a couple of Pernods, and then I asked him about Monsieur Claro.

"Tragic! Tragic! His bronchitis. Last winter was very severe. Madame is living with her sister, in St-Amand-les-Eaux."

"So his oven has cooled down for ever?" I asked, trying not to appear too curious.

"You are poetic, Monsieur Paul! Yes, that old-fashioned oven, and all the stoking it used to demand, has gone for good. But he did try his hand at a modern electric oven, just once before he died, thanks to old Frappe. Our friend made a batch of dough, covered it up real warm, and I drove him over to Frappe's place. He was hugging that basket of dough to himself as if it were a baby!"

"What sort of bread did he turn out?"

"I don't know. He just put the lot into the oven, and then had a long talk with old Frappe. It was very cold, and he started to cough a lot, so I took him home long before the bread was ready. He didn't seem to mind much. When I got him home, we had to help him upstairs to bed. A few days later we were sprinkling holy water on him."

"I expect you miss him. He was a very good baker."

"Of course we miss him! We have to go over to Frappe's for our bread now. And, do you know—I wouldn't have thought it possible—Frappe is baking bread just as good as our Monsieur Claro used to! Which is as good as bread can possibly be, eh, Monsieur Paul?"

"Perhaps he gave his recipe to old Frappe before he died?" I suggested. And, in a way, I suppose he had.

"Funny thing, too," Henri mused; "Frappe has taken to talking to himself in the bakery, just like Monsieur Claro used to."

We drank a silent toast to the memory of a great baker, and a great human being. And, I added to myself, to the greatest baker's assistant in the world—in this world, at any rate.

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NOT TO BE SNIFFED AT

There was a young man of Montrose
Who had pockets in none of his clothes.
When asked by his lass
Where he carried his brass
He said, "Darling, I pay through the nose."

ARNOLD BENNETT

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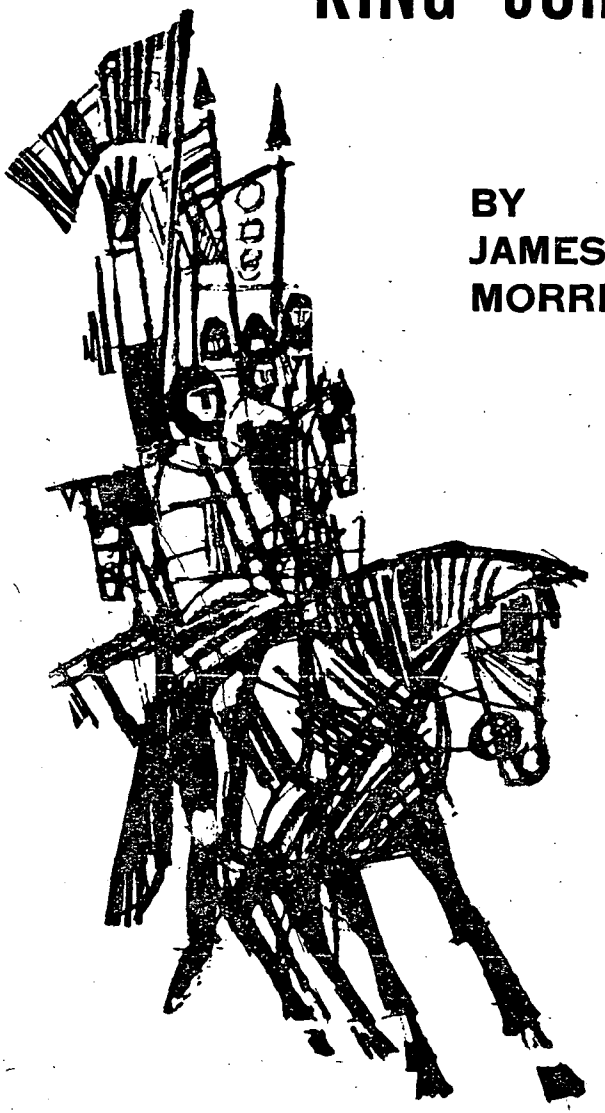
KING JOHN'S



BY
JAMES
MORRIS

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LOST TREASURE

For centuries the quest for gold has sparked man into strange speculations. Usually the gold remains mysteriously elusive—to tantalise the spirit of greed and adventure in men even of our time.

POINT 467164 on the English Ordnance Survey six-inch map marks a silent and haunting spot in the marsh country of East Anglia on the North Sea coast. The country is so soggy that it is actually called the Marshland, and all around this point lies the flat, melancholy landscape of the Fens. Teapot Farm is off to the south-east; Foul Anchor is away to the west; a derelict brick cottage, the haunt of weekend birdwatchers, stands in forlorn sentinel beside a muddy river. To the north you may see a puff of steam from a pile driver, all alone in those wide fields, driving piles for a new electrical booster station, and high and proud across the marshes the big pylons march towards the horizon.

From the subsoil of this desolate place the Professor of Geology at Nottingham University has extracted a number of curiosities, and if you ask him politely, Professor William D. Evans may invite you to his laboratories at the University and let you see them. They are small curiosities but undeniably dramatic. Inspected through the Professor's microscope, they have a fine mysterious glitter to them. Some are shreds of silver, minuscule balls or twisted strands ; some are glimpses of blue enamel, embedded in lumps of clay ; some are small pieces of gold, looking immensely old and fearfully exciting. Evans shows them to you rather as Merlin might open the cupboard upon Excalibur, and he is justified. For these are, it seems probable, the first relics ever found of the treasure King John lost in East Anglia on October 11, 1216.

How John lost his treasure, and died a few days later of grief and overeating, is one of those tales that linger undiminished in folk memory, unfadingly vivid down the centuries.

The King had a rebellion on his hands, and was travelling about eastern England harrying barons. Then as now, the country around the Wash, was a damp, spare and self-sufficient kind of

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territory. It is like an English Holland; like a heaved-up slab of the continental shelf, criss-crossed with dykes and irrigation canals, inhabited by crusty marshmen who talk rather like Australians. And so low does it lie, so watery is its nature, that it seems to slide down to the North Sea, and you are seldom quite sure where marsh ends and ocean begins.

Across this place, in campaigning mood, King John was hurrying that October day. Royal records tell us fairly certainly where he spent each night, but only the hearsay evidence of thirteenth-century chroniclers suggests how he came to lose his treasure.

The long-accepted version is that the King was travelling with his entourage from King's Lynn on the south side of the Wash to Swineshead on the north; that he himself completed the journey safely but that his baggage train, taking a different route, tried to cross a tidal river called the Wellstream, misjudged the place, the time or the tide and fell into the quicksand. The King "lost all his wagons, carts and sumpter horses," wrote Roger of Wendover about ten years after the event, "with the treasures, precious vessels and all the other things which he loved with so much care; *for the ground was opened in the midst of the waves, and bottomless whirlpools swallowed them all up, with the men and the horses*, so that not one foot escaped to announce the disaster to the King."

Later historians have smacked their lips over the well-attested scale of John's royal treasure, which included hundreds of precious cups, goblets, and jewel-studded belts, shrines of silver, ivory and gold, golden phylacteries, staffs ornamented with rubies, sapphires, diamonds, topazes and emeralds, a great German crown that belonged to his grandmother, four valuable rings that were a present from the Pope, and an object thrillingly described in the old inventories as the Sword of Tristram.

Adventurers have often thought of trying to find the treasure, and in 1929 an excavating company was formed, with American financial backing. It did very little excavating, broke up because its members disagreed about the employment of a diviner, and petered out unhappily. Amateurs have often had a try; historians have painstakingly reconstructed the supposed course of events. But it is only now, seven centuries after the catastrophe, that anyone appears actually to have discovered any trace of the treasure that has excited so many imaginations, inspired so many theories and kept so many ploughboys with their eyes hopefully upon the furrow.

How this came about, and why you may see those fragments

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beneath that microscope in Nottingham, is a tale of three men's enthusiasms, and an unusual combination of history and the most diligently-applied science.

The first of the three men is a historian—Professor J. C. Holt of Nottingham University, who looks like a young advertising executive, talks in cheerful staccato bursts, and is one of the greatest living experts on King John and Magna Carta. A few years ago, Holt reached some new conclusions about the magnitude and the site of King John's calamity. The country around the Wash has changed its shape since the Middle Ages. Successive reclamation schemes have turned the wide estuary of the Wellstream into dry land, through which the Nene river flows in an artificially banked channel. The route that John took is therefore a matter of conjecture, only the points of departure and destination being certain.

It used to be assumed that the King himself went inland to Wisbech, some ten miles upstream, before crossing to Swineshead, while the doomed baggage train crossed the river near its mouth—a sandy estuary four and a half miles wide, across which, even in the nineteenth-century, travellers used to be guided at low tide by a man with a long wand. The disaster could only have happened there, historians believed, because the royal baggage train must have been so long that at least four miles of quicksand would have been needed to engulf it.

Holt, like some other modern medievalists, disputes these theories. First, he says, the baggage train was probably much shorter than has been supposed; perhaps only a few carts and pack horses. Second, there is no evidence that the King and his train followed different routes, and we know that John was in Wisbech on October 12. Third, though travellers certainly crossed the river near its mouth in more recent times, there is no evidence that they did so in the Middle Ages.

No, says Holt, a much more likely surmise is that the King, already stripped of much of his wealth by the cost of his wars, intended to cross the Wellstream at some frequented inland ford, together with his modest train. Some carts and pack animals were caught by the tide—perhaps, because in the circumstances of war, John tried to cross too hastily—and the King and his entourage, severely shaken, spent the night in Wisbech, where he perhaps embarked upon the "baneful gluttony" that killed him a week later. Since the baggage train was not long, the calamity could have occurred at a narrow part of the stream, and there is evidence that in ancient times there was a frequented crossing-place six or seven miles inland.

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Pondering these various hypotheses, sifting his conclusions and weighing the probabilities, Holt decided that the most likely site of the accident was a point somewhere near the modern village of Walpole Island, to be found on Sheet TF 41 NE of the Ordnance Survey six-inch map.

The second enthusiast is an electrical engineer, Doctor George Tagg. Tagg is the chief researcher of a London firm, and is an expert on electrical measuring instruments.

He has lately been particularly concerned with a device made by his company called a Megger resistivity meter. This instrument, by projecting electrical impulses into the subsoil and measuring the resistances they meet, enables a picture to be built up of the deposits beneath.

Some years ago he produced a new and better version of this device, and his London firm consulted their advertising agency about publicising the new model. A man at the advertising agency recalled that in the nineteen-thirties an expedition had gone to the Fen country to look for King John's treasure, and although its members were working on the old assumption that the baggage train crossed the Wellstream at its mouth, some of them believed there was an ancient causeway farther inland by which the carts and pack animals might have travelled. Because reclamation efforts have now covered the area with fifteen feet of topsoil, why not, said the advertising man to Doctor Tagg, take the Megger up there, find that old causeway beneath the ground, and thus demonstrate the powers of the instrument in an interesting and memorable way ?

It was a tremendous task. Tagg spent months in the Fen country with his heavy equipment, probing and measuring. But at last, he detected an old clay causeway beneath the ground, snaking its way through the sandy subsoil across what had been the course of the Wellstream. If he traced its route on a Survey map, he might have noticed that it passed through Square 4616, across the fields from Walpole Island.

With a slight Glamorgan swagger to his walk, Professor Evans, the geologist from Nottingham, now enters this story. In 1958, he acquired an oil-drilling rig, and decided to use it to investigate the concentrations of sediment that form oilfields. He wanted to explore the rate of decay of matter, and to discover if animal matter, as well as plant matter, contributed to the formation of oil. There were two essentials for such an underground inquiry. First, he needed a subterrain where plant and animal matter mingle. This led him to the Fens, once under water and still

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rich in marine deposits ; and this led him, as it happened, to Walpole Island.

He knew, of course, about the Megger resistivity meter, and he heard about Tagg's achievement in finding the causeway. This, he realised, could be exceedingly useful to him. Everything above the level of the causeway was certainly post 1600. Everything around and below it was certainly earlier. In the summer of 1958 he set off with his rig and a crew of students. He bored thirteen holes in all, in 1958 and 1959, and took back to Nottingham large quantities of specimen material.

The purely geological results were important, but so were the historical by-products. Encouraged by his friend Holt, Professor Evans could hardly help becoming interested. Some cynics had long dismissed the whole tale of John's lost treasure because, they said, there were in fact no quicksands in the area. Evans soon disproved this view. All around the causeway were quicksands in a layer fifteen to twenty feet deep. Moreover, by examining the shape of the coastline, the movement of the tides and the old course of the river, Evans was able to estimate where the low point of Tagg's causeway would have been and therefore where the baggage train would have foundered. It was, as Holt reasoned, in the neighbourhood of Walpole Island, near the northern bank of the old riverbed . . .

Evans was not a treasure hunter or a historian, but a hard-working geologist. Methodically he completed his work, and it was only in the late summer of 1959 that he allowed his crew, just for the fascination of it, to sink a hole at the conjectural site of the accident. And there, one evening in October, 1959, the drill struck something very solid, twenty-five feet down in the quicksand. The bit was twisted askew by the impact. In the rubble that came up the crew found a number of oddities : old nails, bits of wrought iron, and minute glittering fragments of gold. They drilled again nearby but found nothing more.

There was, however, one other interesting thing. Somewhere down there, so Professor Evans discovered, was a reservoir of old animal matter, long since decomposed. Could it be horses ?

The two Professors remained quiet about their discovery. Theirs was, they said, an academic interest. They still thought the evidence was flimsy and they did not wish to make a sensation of it. To please an old friend they did tell the tale to the local BBC correspondent in Nottingham, who used it in a regional broadcast. It was not until a year ago that a BBC television commentator, stumbling upon the story by chance, made people

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in England aware that Point 467164 might be the site of a great historical find. Now it is probably only a matter of time before the hunt is on, and there are already rumours of plans, counter-plans and big business on the move.

It will not be as easy as it may sound to scoop out that old causeway, for drilling through quicksand requires great technical skill and expensive equipment. All the same, it seems odd that nothing much has yet been done to follow up Professor Evans' coup de théâtre. The only treasure hunters to have visited the Wash since are the members of a youth group who went there, with Evans' encouragement, as a kind of exercise in initiative, and found nothing at all. A hazy sense of secrecy now seems to surround the whole subject, leaving many unanswered questions.

Why, for instance, did those two Professors do so little themselves for four years after the discovery? Why did Holt's most recent paper on the Wash disaster, which appeared in 1961, make no reference to those fragments on the drill bit? Could it be that the gold was dropped down the drill hole as a student hoax? No one seems able to penetrate this series of mysteries. When Evans bought himself a new car, the joke among Nottingham students was that he and Holt had already found the treasure and had it all stashed away at home.

But it is certain that they have not. Nobody has recently put a drill down at Point 467164, and unless that power station pile driver is all an enormous bluff, nobody shows signs of doing so now. The exact place where they found those curiosities is in a field of gooseberry bushes, and for most of the time it is altogether deserted, except for farmhands passing that way. It feels almost lifeless, and the air hangs heavy over the Fens. You would not know that a royal train had passed this way, the tent-keeper and the napier, the Keepers of the Wardrobe and the priests of the King's chapel. You would not know quicksands were beneath your feet. You certainly would not guess that this might be the site of treasure-trove.

There is some feeling it will not end happily. Gold has a way of corrupting.

But lawyers have already established that this will not be treasure-trove in the strictly legal sense. It is very well known whom those buried riches belong to, if they still exist at all.

They were the personal possessions of King John, and today they are properly classed, so the law says, as Lost Property of the Queen of England.

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It was a false meekness: he exuded danger

NIGHT CALL

BY CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG

THE phone rang, loud in the dark. Young Doctor Blain summoned his faculties from sleep, as he had trained himself to do, picked the phone up on the fourth ring, and said his name.

"This is Connie Miller. Do you remember me?"

He cast back for remembrance, through the years of practice, through university, all the way back to school. Yes, the pretty one. The gay and popular one.

Once upon a time a shy youth named David Blain had been permitted to take her to a dance. A painful and bewildering experience, for she had been a queen in that vanished world, and he a curiosity.

"Oh yes, Connie," he said in his grown-up voice. Then, because it was four-thirty in the morning, he asked her what the trouble was.

"It's Mike. He's sick!" Now he could hear the choke of fear that so often came over the telephone in the night. "David, could you please come? Quickly? We are out at the old Benton farm, on the highway. Please?"

"What seems to be the matter with him?" he asked in the calm voice of the doctor who needed to know.

"He hurt his hand. It's infected and he's feverish. He isn't even making sense and I'm scared. Please hurry."

"Be right there."

Doctor Blain began to dress, wasting no movement. It must be ten years, he thought, since Connie Miller had married Michael March, the good-looking young man with the cleft in his chin, the restless pushing one, the one who was going places.

He hadn't heard anything about the Marches for a long time. Whatever they were doing now, back here, out at the old Benton farm, he couldn't imagine.

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Well, he needn't imagine. He had been called out there. His grey eyes in the mirror caught his own grey eyes in his snub-nosed homely face with a grave reminding glance.

He left the flat, and got his car out of the garage. His big powerful car. Twenty-nine-year-old, very human David Blain knew that it was not altogether " for the sake of his patients " that the doctor kept a new, mechanically perfect, very powerful car. It took off, smooth as silk. Very good business for the doctor—if it pleased the young man, too, so much the better.

He slid swiftly through the sleeping town. Out in the country, the fields were dark, the sky held only the faintest hint of dawn. He passed a lorry or two, and a few people going to work.

David sometimes told himself that he must have stumbled on a key, a secret—something. People supposed that a doctor found it difficult, a constant ordeal, to rise and go whenever, wherever he was called. But this was not so.

When he had taken an oath, when he had subjected himself to a leading idea, he had made his life not difficult, but easy. To know exactly what he ought to do made everything simple. There were no questions to ask himself now, for instance—no doubt and no choice. No wondering whether he really wished to be responsible for the well-being of Michael March.

Couldn't a doctor's wife, he wondered, accept the idea, too, and find that the burden was easy ? He had heard girls say that a doctor's wife let herself in for a terrible life. This had made him a bit cautious with girls. It would have to be the right girl. She would have to understand how simple it was. She would have to agree.

The big car ate up the highway. He soon came to the narrow side road that crossed some fields and led into the old Benton place. The farmhouse was off the road, tucked back against a low hill.

David drew right up to the door. He got out into silence and darkness. No light showed in the house. It might have been deserted.

As he put his foot upon the low porch, the front door opened. " David? Oh, good. Oh, I'm glad! " She drew him in and as the door closed behind him, he found he could see dimly. She had her hand on his forearm, leading him to a place where light spilt through a doorway.

There was something frightened, furtive, a whispering quality, a tip-toeing about her. The ten years that had tightened and integrated David Blain had loosened and somewhat scattered the

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force of that neat, smart, pretty little high-school girl. Connie was a woman subtly blowzy.

Of course, she was anxious, and he made allowances. Yet her brown eyes did not quite meet his directly. They shifted. He realised with a bit of a shock that they were by no means friendly. They were distraught, haunted. Her hand told him how tense she was.

She was trying to smile, but the smile was a performance. "I'm so glad to see you. How are you, David?"

He was reminded of the queen, throwing a scrap of her attention to him, years ago.

He didn't tell her how he was. "Where's the patient?" he asked gently.

Michael March was in a back bedroom downstairs. Michael March, the one who had been going places, had come here. And this was no home. The furnishings were old and shabby and not particularly clean. The whole atmosphere reflected the taste of another generation.

It was only a temporary perch. So temporary that the patient lying on the bed, was not even in the bed. He wore his clothes—a soiled shirt, wrinkled trousers. The cleft was still there in March's chin, but he was a sick man now, dishevelled, muttering with fever. His right hand was wound around with gauze. David looked at it and was appalled.

"This should have had attention long ago," he said gravely. "When did it happen?"

"Monday," murmured Connie. "Oh, David, please fix it . . . The doctor's here," she said to the man on the bed. "You'll be all right now."

"How did it happen? What did this?" David demanded.

"It was an accident," she said vaguely. Her hand touched Mike's forehead and David could see how the fingers trembled.

"Oh, he is so sick. Can you do something quickly?" Her backbone, as he could see under the taut fabric of her rumpled dark dress, was rigid, as if it waited for a blow.

The doctor worked over the messy hand. He cleaned it as best he could, bound it, shot in an antibiotic and straightened from the task. He said quietly, "He'll have to go into hospital, Connie."

"No," she said rather stupidly. "We are going away this morning."

The patient's head moved and he murmured, "Connie—"

As she bent over, David rose and walked into the sitting-room next door.

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He found the light switch, flicked it on, picked up the phone and dialled the hospital. Staring at a picture of somebody's ancestor, he wondered sadly how the Marches came to be in this strange place.

Maggie's jaunty voice said in his ear, "Memorial Hospital." Maggie Fowler was on the switchboard at the hospital from nine-thirty in the evening to five-thirty in the morning. She always said, "Memorial Hospital" in that gay and lilting manner, as if to assure whoever called by night that the hospital was wide awake and cheerfully ready for anything.

"Maggie? Dave Blain." He did not say, impersonally, "Doctor Blain," because he could so vividly imagine her nice square face bent into the light, the twist of the corner of her eyebrow. He took Maggie out, in the infrequent hours when they were both off duty. Maggie was a dear girl. Maybe she was the right girl. The trouble was, David knew, that Maggie herself wasn't sure. She saw many things from her post in the hospital, and she wasn't altogether sold on the idea of joining permanently the ranks of those to whom "night" was not private and inviolate.

"I'm bringing in a patient," he told her now on the phone. "May need surgery. Will you try to get hold of Doctor Parker?"

"Right away. Don't you want the ambulance?"

"No, I—"

Behind him Connie screamed, "No!" She flew through the door and flung herself upon him. "No, no."

David lowered the instrument and his right arm caught her shaking body around the shoulders.

"You can't telephone!" she said, hoarse with fear. "You can't call anybody! Put it down!"

He did exactly that. He put the phone down on the table. But not in its cradle. It lay there, alive.

He used both hands to hold Connie a little away so that he could look at her. "I'm afraid you don't understand," he said patiently. "That hand is a real mess, Connie."

"But you fixed it. He's better now. You've got to go."

"I haven't fixed it," he said quietly, shocked by this childishness. "I can't fix it. Not here. He's very sick, Connie. I'm sorry to have to tell you—but he may lose that hand."

"No." She didn't seem to take in his words at all.

"Or lose his life," the doctor said more sharply. "It's serious, Connie."

"You mustn't be seen here. Take your car. Go away."

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Patiently he started all over again. "You don't understand—"

"You're the one who doesn't understand," she cried frantically. "You don't know about John. He's gone into town, but he's coming back. If he finds you here he'll kill you!" Her voice was a shriek. "He'll kill us all!"

He slapped her cheek lightly. His right arm held her shoulders with all his strength until their shuddering, under his hard physical support, began to lessen.

"All right," he said. "Now tell me quietly. What is all this? Who is this John?"

"He—he's Mike's boss. He hired Mike. He's gone out for a while. You mustn't be here when he comes back."

"Hired Mike to do what?"

"To make—to work with explosives. Mike was in demolition work in the Services. He—David, we haven't got time to talk. You've got to go. And hurry." He was still as a rock and she gave him a push. "Now, please. If John finds out that I called you—or that anyone was here—" She began to try a softness in an effort to appeal to him, and it was a somewhat sickening softness. "I'm thinking of you, David," she said meltingly.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," the doctor said.

"Nothing to be afraid—" Her head went back. The cords of her neck were ugly with strain. "Why do you think we couldn't call a doctor long ago?" she cried. "Because John wouldn't let us. John wouldn't have anybody here. Or let us go anywhere. This is the first—I took a horrible chance! Well, you came. You did what you could. Now go—please. You don't understand—"

"Explosives injured that hand?"

"Yes. Yes, the first one. It went off."

"The first what?" he said flatly.

"The first bomb," she said.

The doctor reached through confusion for his own steady guiding purpose that would tell him what he ought to do. "Mike is going to the hospital," he said sternly. "I'll take him there. I'll take you too. What is there to fear?"

"We can't—now" her eyes looked sick—"can't go into town."

"Why not?"

"We're only waiting for the money. Mike's pay. Then we're going away."

"Mike isn't going anywhere except to hospital with that hand," said David sharply. "Now stop this nonsense and go and get him ready."

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Then she screamed at him, " You don't understand who John is! Mike can't go to town because—after this morning—" Her face broke. " Oh, David, help me. I don't know what to do."

Her spirit had broken now; if he had not held her she would have fallen.

" The only way you can help me is to go away," she sobbed. " Right now. Before it's too late." Panic stiffened her and she pushed at him. " John won't be much longer."

" Connie—"

She looked into his eyes with a false, a grotesque coquetry. " Why should you be killed, dear David?"

He felt a great pity for her, who lived by nothing but the same old petty power of being a female.

" Who is this John? What is he doing in town?"

" I can't tell you."

" But you will."

" He's placing the bombs," she said in a high, hard voice. " The booby traps."

" Placing—where?"

" Oh, I don't know." Connie turned her head. " I wouldn't let them tell me. I didn't want . . . It has nothing to do with me. We had to have some money. We were in a jam. But John won't pay until after—then we are leaving."

David wasn't listening to the dreary voice. Bombs! In town? Where? Bombs set to go off? In a public place? For some reason he had a vision of mangled children. He had to find out where.

He said quietly, sadly, " Mike has been making bombs for this John to use?"

She was breathing in long panting sighs.

" For pay?" he said.

Her face flushed. " It was just a job. Mike didn't know, at first—"

" But now you do?"

" John would have killed us if we hadn't gone on. We couldn't do anything. Now please . . . "

David made no more reproach. There was too little to say and it was too late to say it. He felt great pity for Connie, and for Michael March. Sorry for all those who were lost, who had been going places, and taken short cuts, and had arrived here.

He said, " I'll take you both into town, right away. Mike to the hospital. You can go to the police. If you tell them quickly and they stop this John— What is the rest of his name? "

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She shook her head.

He helped her gently into a chair. " One minute, then we'll go. We'll get right out of this. Don't be afraid."

She sat like dough, sinking into herself.

The girl on the switchboard had listened in on the open line as much as she could, though now and then she had to deal with other calls. She had heard a woman screaming, " No." Afterwards she had heard voices, but not the words. At last she caught Dave's voice again. " Maggie?"

" Yes, Dave?"

" I'm out at the old Benton farm. Evidently with some criminals." Her heart jumped, but she made no sound of alarm. " One if them is in town, right now, with a bomb or bombs. He is placing them somewhere. Like booby traps. I can't find out exactly where. Call the chief, Maggie. Right away. The man's name is John. That's all the information I can give him." His voice changed. " What . . . ? "

Maggie could almost see his head turn. She waited, her heart beating slowly and steadily, her ears aching with listening.

In the farmhouse, Connie had lifted her drooping head. She was saying in a mourning voice, " It's too late. Didn't you hear the car? He's come back. He's out there. He will have seen your car. Oh, David, it's too late. He'll kill us. He went into town to kill one man. What's going to stop him now?"

" Keep still," said David. " Don't speak." Into the phone he said, " Keep listening, Maggie. I'll try to find out more."

" I'm here," Maggie said.

David let the phone hang loosely a little way from his ear and poised his right hand over the dial. He listened. Yes, someone had come. The front door was opening. Now there were footsteps in the hall.

David looked down at the dial and began to make motions with his forefinger, as if only now was he trying to make a connection. This was deception, because the phone was open and Maggie Fowler was listening at the other end.

A man's voice said, " Better drop that."

David stiffened, as if he were startled, and lifted his head. He saw a tall, thin, dark-skinned man with cruel lips and too much white in his eyes. He held a gun in his hand.

" Drop it, I said."

David said icily, " Who are you?"

The wicked snout of the weapon kept steady.

The man did not say who he was. " Drop it," he snarled.

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"Put that gun away."

"Drop the phone, I said. Now."

Maggie, in the hospital, heard the line close as the phone went into the cradle. But she had also heard David's voice, saying, "Put that gun away."

Maggie Fowler's hands flew.

A phone shrilled in the thinning dark. The chief of police was in his bed. He woke and with elephantine patience he turned over and picked up the phone. "Yes?"

"Dad," said Maggie, and her voice was clear, incisive. "Dad, I had a call from David. He is out at the old Benton place. With some criminals. He says one of them, a man named John, is in town now, planting a bomb. Or more than one. Booby traps. And somebody is holding a gun on David."

Chief of Police Fowler blinked and reached for the light switch. The clock said five-ten. "The Benton place?"

"Yes, Dad. Can you send—"

"Hold on. What's Dave doing there?" The chief's feet were already feeling for his shoes.

"He has a patient," Maggie told him. "Dad—"

"Bombs, eh?" the big man said. "Doesn't know where?" If Maggie had known where she would have told him. "John, eh?" said the chief in some disgust. "I'll go myself, Maggie. Take it easy."

"O.K., Dad." She cut the connection, swiftly and sensibly.

She sat in her safe nook in the hospital, her nook that was, nevertheless, a clearing point for trouble. Maggie Fowler knew quite well that she was falling in love with David Blain. She also knew, and she had known a long time, that there was a decision to be made. There was a commitment that she must make with all her heart or not at all. And it was difficult.

But now David stood where somebody had a gun and had to be told to put it down. Someone who was a criminal. It was no time for self-examination, no time for nerves or lamentation. It was time to be cool and steady. It was time to stay, to be where she was, on duty. For Maggie Fowler, the world rolled towards the sun, slowly, slowly.

Chief Fowler rubbed the back of his head, dialled headquarters and gave orders. "Squad car better nip out to that farm. Take enough men and watch out—somebody is armed. And they are holding a gun on the doc, possibly. Get going. Meantime, put Nelson on this line . . .

"Nelson? There's some joker with a bomb or bombs loose

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in this town. Name of John. Big help, eh? Don't know what he's after. He's planting them somewhere. Turn out everybody. Check the schools first . . . Yes, we're working blind. It's a small chance we'll find anything. But do the best you can. I'm going out to the farm."

He rose from the edge of his bed and reached for his clothes. A minimum of twenty minutes, he estimated, for the car to get out there. A lot of bullets could leave a gun in twenty minutes.

The chief had been through some tough years and he did not get excited. Still, he would go to the farm himself. Because it was David Blain out there, in a jam, and the chief thought well of young Doctor Blain. Because the chief also loved his daughter Maggie very much, and he had a dream for her, in a careful parental sort of way.

But it was the bomb business that really worried him. Booby traps? Some unsuspecting souls would set off some bombs? It was his business to see that nobody got hurt; but a bomb is a small object to find in a town, even in a small town. If he went to the farm, it might be the best and quickest way to find out where the bombs were . . .

David Blain put the phone down. He was taking the measure of the man with the gun all the while. He was a criminal, David judged, in a vicious, reckless mood, on the verge of some triumph. He had just planted some bombs. Now his objectives would be, first, to make sure nobody found the bombs too soon, and second, to get away free. What was there to be done with a man in such a mood?

The first thing was to convince him that David knew nothing about any bombs. So David stood up very straight, very cold, very calm. "I am a doctor," he announced. "There is a sick man here. It's my business to see that he is taken care of. What are you doing here?"

"Who are you calling?" the man growled.

"The hospital, naturally," said David icily. "This man must go to hospital. We may have to cut off that hand."

This was sharp and brutal. David was pulling his rank, his prestige, his authority. And projecting an idea of ignorance and indifference about anything but his patient.

"Too bad," said the man with the gun. His eyes turned suspiciously. "How did you get here?"

"The sick man called me, of course," said David with cold scorn. He didn't even look at Connie. "As he should have done days ago. Whoever you are, put that gun away. Get it into your head, please, that I'm not a burglar. I'm a doctor."

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The gunman moistened his lips. His head turned. He looked at the woman. Connie was slumped in the chair. She had given up. Something about her utter passivity seemed to relax the man.

David saw that the gun was not quite so sure of itself now. Something—some second thought that weakened the man's resolution—worked in the mind behind the small sharp eyes in the long thin face.

The gunman said, "Look, doc, I'm a friend. I mean, I'm staying here, too. I—"

"If you live here, why didn't you call me?" David cut in, attacking, keeping the advantage. "Do you know you have neglected that injured hand until it's very serious? He may not live."

"Pretty sick, eh?" the man murmured, and the gun was no longer the extension of a stiff and hostile hand, but slanted down.

"He's delirious," snapped David. "That's how sick he is. Now I'm taking him to the hospital where we can do something for him. I'll take the lady, too."

The man said, "Listen, I got a car. I'll take him in to the hospital." This was craft of some kind. Perhaps it was the second objective. Get away.

"My car," said David immediately. "Have some sense, man. My car's got the doctor's sign on it. I could get him there long before you."

"You mean"—pale lids came down slyly—"the cops would let you go as fast as you want, eh? That your car outside?"

"Certainly it's my car," David said impatiently. "This is an emergency. A life is at stake. Try to understand that. Get a blanket," he barked at Connie, "and your coat."

The gunman had lowered the gun entirely now. "Look," he said, smoothing his face to an expression of innocence, "I'm sorry, doc. I didn't know, see? I mean, a stranger walks in at this time of the morning—you can't blame me."

"I understand," snapped David. He took two long strides towards the bedroom door. So far, so good. But perhaps he had put a wrong idea about his car into the gunman's head.

"Hold it a minute," the man said, and David looked back. The man's face was all sly again. Suspicious. The gun still hung slack in his hand, but it was ready to come up. Now where did I make a mistake, David wondered.

"Calling the hospital, you said you were. So how come, now, you're not calling the hospital, doctor?"

David snapped his fingers. "Right." He forced a quick

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smile, a nod of thanks. "You put me off, waving that weapon around," he said rather crossly. "Excuse me."

There was no way out of it. He had to call the hospital. And now the gunman came sidling to stand very close. David could smell a sour, evil purpose about him. The gunman was going to be listening in, going to be sure who was called and what was said on both ends of the line. A wrong word would swing him back to the hostile side.

David dialled with a steady finger. Oh, Maggie, he thought don't go all female—don't ask curious questions—not now. Three lives could be hanging on the exact tone of Maggie Fowler's voice.

"Memorial Hospital," she sang out blithely.

"This is Doctor Blain," said David in his coldest, most staccato manner. "I am coming in with an emergency."

"Yes, doctor." Maggie's voice was staccato too.

Bands across David's chest relaxed. "This may be an amputation," he went on in the same cold, quick way. "Notify the necessary people, will you?"

"Doctor Pater is on call, doctor," Maggie said crisply.

And David's heart leapt up and danced in his breast. There was no Doctor Pater, but pater means father. So the chief of police had been called already, and Maggie—bless her—was telling him so!

David's mind worked like lightning. The gunman was still listening—yet if more were needed to be told, David knew the intelligence, the steady understanding with which he was connected.

What other information could David send into town? "He wanted to kill one man," Connie had said. One man. That could mean that the bombs might not be in a public or crowded place. They would be waiting somewhere for an individual.

David said into the phone, "You might tell Doctor Pater to look at the case history of a man named Francis. Francis Ferdinand. Give him an idea of what we are up against."

"Francis," Maggie repeated flatly, obediently, as if she were writing this down. "Ferdinand."

The thin man was watching him. By David's side the gun twitched. "It's a moot question whether we can save this thing," he said. "But we can try."

"Yes, doctor."

"Right." The doctor put the phone down safely. He wanted to grin. How many times had he and Maggie, when one

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friendly argument or another had come to an impassé, said to each other, " Well, it's a moot question."

And how many times had he or Maggie said to the other, " Let's look it up in the moot." So for the big unabridged dictionary in Chief Fowler's den they had their private name. The dictionary was the " moot." Maggie would catch on.

The impulse to grin was wiped away from David's mind. " I'll get the patient into my car," he said.

The man said, " I'll be going along with you, doc. Maybe I can help, eh? "

" As you wish," said David coldly. He walked past the thin man, past the gun, seeming preoccupied, purposeful, going towards his patient.

He swung into the back bedroom. The thing to do, now, was stall a little bit until the police came.

On the bed, the patient lay with bright eyes. David marched over to him and then glanced back. The gunman had not followed him. This was odd. Yet it was something to be grateful for, and to be used.

David slipped the stethoscope around his neck—it was what the layman for ever saw a doctor do in the movies. He did not put the earpieces into his ears.

He bent and said softly, " Buck up, Mike. We'll get you to the hospital pretty soon now."

" John's back." The patient was lucid.

" Right. I'll get you out of this somehow." ..

" Never make it."

David fussed with the stethoscope.

" Not if John goes with us," Mike March said.

" Maybe." David glanced behind. " But I'll stall. The police are on their way. The chief's been notified already."

" Chief Fowler?" Mike March's green eyes with the brown flecks in them showed a flicker of bitter amusement. " Chief Fowler won't get out of his house alive," Mike said.

" What do you— "

" There's a booby trap wired to his back door and another one to his front door. He won't get out alive through any door."

" Fowler!" David's heart took a swing.

" That's John Barca in there. Been in prison for armed robbery. While he was in prison his kid brother's gang robbed a tailor's shop. The kid got shot, running away. Fowler did the shooting. The kid died. So Barca is after Fowler."

David stared into the green eyes.

" The kid's gang beat up the tailor so he's paralysed for life.

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But John isn't worrying about that. He wants to avenge his brother. I guess he's a little crazy."

"You knew this— "

"I took on the job," Mike said, "before I knew any of this. John's got money and the pay was fine. I figured I'd never know, but I was told, and then I was a prisoner. Didn't have the guts to . . . take a crack at getting out."

The bright green eyes made no excuses. They accepted guilt and folly. "Connie shouldn't have . . . called you," Mike said. "Too bad. You're in it now."

"I've got to let them know," David said.

It was perfectly possible to think of two things at once. Part of his brain had continued to listen to Mike's low mutter. Another part considered what was happening in town.

Chief Fowler had been called up. Maggie had said so. What would he do? He'd dress. He'd sally forth. If he had already gone out of the back door, towards his car— David looked at his wristwatch.

Then he felt something hit him a mental buffet that was staggering.

There was worse, if worse there could be.

It was now twenty-two minutes past five—and Maggie would be leaving for home in eight minutes . . .

Maggie! Mangled and bleeding! No, he cried in his head.

"We've got to get word," he said.

"How?" asked the sick man. In his eyes, brightly, ruin and tragedy and defeat were accepted.

David thought furiously. Get to the phone, of course. But how? Against a man with a gun who was even now in the very act of murder? Get to the phone and tell the police, in his hearing? Not likely.

Overpower him? But how?

Stall until the cops came, if indeed they were coming? No, not now. No time to stall.

Go out on the highway with a sick man and a woman so frantic as to have been stricken stupid, and a gunman who wanted the doctor's car? Would David get to another telephone? Not likely. To town in time? No, never make it. Would he get to town at all?

If he could only make an excuse to call the hospital once more, save Maggie anyhow. Yes, that was it—he must try.

The patient said in a whining voice, "Will I lose my hand, doc?"

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David glanced behind him. The gunman was standing there. The gun was not in sight.

"We'll do our best to save it," said the doctor soothingly. He straightened up. "I'm going to bring him out," he said as casually as he could. "You came in a car, didn't you? Will you get it out of the way of mine, please?" Orders—firm and polite, but doctor's orders.

"Guess I better do that," the gunman said meekly. He turned, went through into the hall, and David actually heard the front door slam. Telephone!

He brushed past Connie, who was standing in the way with a blanket on her arm, helpless, passive, dazed and dependent. The lights were off in the sitting-room and he did not turn them on. He snatched up the phone. It came up with a strange lightness. The phone had been cut from its moorings.

Chief Fowler had his shoes laced and had started through the house towards the back door when the phone rang. He turned in his tracks, put on the living-room light again, and went to answer it.

"Dad? Dave called again."

"What happened?"

"I don't know," said Maggie. "Somebody was listening, I could tell that by the way he spoke. I think he's fooled somebody. I told him you were on the job. He had a message."

"Go ahead."

"He said to tell you to look up the case history of Francis Ferdinand."

"The case history of who?"

"A man named Francis Ferdinand. That's what he said. Dad, it's got to mean something."

"What does it mean, then?"

"Dave was there with some criminal. Dad, he wouldn't have said a single word that didn't mean something."

"Well, I don't get it. I've got to move, Maggie, if I'm going to make it out there."

"Wait, Dad, you better look it up in the dictionary."

"Dictionary?"

"Dave wants you to. I know that. David wants you to look it up in the dictionary."

"Look what up, for the love of Pete?"

"He meant something," she insisted. "I'm telling you—everything he said must have meant something. Dad, has anybody gone out there?"

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" On their way, right now."

" Will they—will they be care— "

" If Dave's O.K. so far," the chief said, " you don't need to worry too much, honey. You come along home."

Maggie said, " Yes." The chief could almost hear her swallow down her fear. She's a good kid, he thought proudly. " But the message," she said. " Francis Ferdinand. Look it up, Dad. Please."

" Some message," the chief grumbled. " O.K., Maggie." He hung up.

Sounded ridiculous, that message. Was Dave trying to tip him off as to the identity of this criminal? Was there a case on police files—anybody named Francis? Or Ferdinand? " Look it up in the dictionary." Now that was ridiculous.

In the corner of his den on its stand was the huge book. Chief Fowler chewed on his mouth. Then he walked into the den, put the light on. It would only take a minute. Francis—Francis Ferdinand.

But names wouldn't be in the dictionary. Frowning, he turned away. Better get on out there, where the trouble was. He started back through his house towards the kitchen door, to his car in the garage. He stopped. Wait a minute—yes, there were names in the dictionary. A whole long list of them. A Pronouncing Biographical—

He turned back and went swiftly through the rooms. His thick forefinger turned pages.

" Francis of Assisi . . . Francis I . . . Francis II . . . Francis Ferdinand : Archduke of Austria. Nephew of Francis Josef I. Heir presumptive . . . Assassinated."

Was this the message? Why ? What did it mean? To assassinate meant to kill somebody, like maybe an archduke or president or big shot. The chief stood still, pushing his lips in and out.

Pretty soon he moved to the phone and called Nelson at headquarters. " Listen, I got reason to believe this bomber is trying to assassinate somebody. Who's in town that's a big shot? Better take a run out, cover the mayor. And how about Judge Fox? Who else is there? "

The chief listened patiently while Nelson thought out loud about prominent men. He glanced at his watch. Wouldn't catch up with the squad car now. So they'd manage without him. He would simply go on down to headquarters in a minute. Take over there.

At five twenty-seven, Connie went numbly out of the house,

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carrying the blanket. After her came David, supporting most of the weight of a staggering man. It was getting light. The stubble in the fields made lines across the land. There was some traffic on the highway.

The gunman had moved his car, and in the growing dawn David could see him leaning in at the doctor's car, studying the dashboard. "What are you doing?" David said.

"Checking the petrol."

Without the key, the petrol gauge wasn't registering. David guessed that the man was actually working out how to run this car when he eventually took it over. He said, "Open the door."

The gunman did so. Waited. The gun, no doubt, was waiting in his pocket.

"Get around the other side and help me put him on the seat."

The gunman obeyed the doctor's orders. For now. For how long?

David's brain, scrambling, touching and leaving a hundred wild ideas, had settled on one . . .

At five twenty-nine Maggie's relief came sauntering along.

"Bad night?" she asked cheerfully.

Maggie said, "Kinda." She got up and unhooked herself from duty.

"Go on home and get some sleep," said Joan Dixon, yawning.

Maggie said, "Do something for me, Joan? Call this number?" It was the number of the old Benton place. "If anybody answers, just say you are calling to confirm Doctor Blain's call."

Joan looked up at her curiously, but did as she was bidden.

"The line is out of order," sang the operator. Maggie sighed.

"You look terrible," said Joan, disconnecting. "You don't catch me taking night duty. Nights are for sleeping. Why don't you join the human race?"

Maggie smiled feebly.

"Go on home, I said." Joan went to work.

Maggie looked at the clock. Her eyes were large in her face. She had done all she could. There was no connection any more. She put her jacket over her arm and walked away.

David heaved and struggled to get the sick man into the car and lying down on the back seat. Mike March was in pain and did not seem to care, one way or another, about the place or time or anything. David, most vividly aware of place and time, took the

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blanket from Connie and tucked it around her husband. "Now," he said to her, "I want you to help me."

In the faint light she looked as if she had been hypnotised. She went where she was told to go, did what she was told to do, and had no hope of anything.

"Can you sit on the floor?" asked David.

Connie got into the back and sat on the floor.

"Put your back against the seat back, that's it. Now—" He took her flaccid left hand and put it against Mike's hip. He put the lifeless right hand against Mike's shoulder. He said, "I want you to hold hard. I shall be in a hurry and I don't want him bounced off that seat, brace yourself and hold hard. Can you do that?"

"Yes," she said listlessly. He was very sorry for her in a submerged part of himself. Connie was only a pawn and he must help her. He did not judge her. He did not give her any hope either. It was better if she stayed in that lethargy.

"Now—" he glanced at the gunman—"you don't absolutely have to go," he suggested.

"Oh, I want to go," said the man quickly. "Friends of mine. Yes, I'm going."

The man was transparent. Concern for a friend was so obviously the last, the least likely thought that would enter his mind.

"Get in front with me then," snapped David. He was still giving the orders. But not for much longer.

David's mind had gone well ahead and made its prognosis. He knew that the gunman would bring out the gun before they got to the end of the narrow side road. By the time they got to the end, the gunman would be giving the orders. The gun would be rammed into David. David would obey or die.

If he obeyed, the big fast car would be sent turning to the right, not to the left. The left was the way along which the police might be coming, the way to town, to the hospital. Oh, no; the gunman who wanted to get away free would make David turn to the right, and they would fly off into deep country and if the sick man died of his poisoned blood, what did the gunman care? And the bombs would be set off. Nobody would have been warned.

Yet if David defied the gun it would simply go off. Then who would save the sick man's hand or life? Or try—if it were not already too late—to save the chief? Who would save Maggie?

David had to stay alive; stay intelligent; stay acting and being. He had to think ahead and he had thought ahead.

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He had chosen a plan.

Now he had a few more moments. A part of the length of this side road.

"Hold on, now," he said to his passengers, "because I'm not going to spare the horses."

"Nice car," the gunman said. His meekness was false. He exuded danger. He bided his time and his time was soon. He watched David press buttons.

David backed and turned the car. Then the big beauty moved off, smooth as silk. David got her up to speed as if she had been a rocket. He was tearing down the narrow way. At this speed, he could make no turn into the highway traffic. But the gunman hadn't thought of that yet.

Now? David wondered. He stepped her up, went faster. Now!

He pulled his elbows in across the wheel and made his two hands into a cup of flesh to receive his own skull. Then he stepped hard on his power brakes.

The jolt was phenomenal. John Barca, the gunman, unwarned, unbraced, flew forward into the windshield. The windshield did not break, but Barca's head possibly had. David did not care very much if it had. The gunman was out. The menace of him was suddenly gone.

David took in a breath. "You all right, Connie?" He turned to see. He had placed her where she would be hurt the least. The jolt had only rammed her back into the upholstery. His patient, he saw over his shoulder, had slid off the seat on top of her. But she broke the fall for him, just as David had planned it.

So far, so good. He didn't even wait to reach back and unscramble them.

Five thirty-five. Maggie would be on her way, surely. Walking home, going up the path, feet on the porch.

There was nothing to do but ask his big beauty for speed again. The car responded. He skidded into the highway, screeching left by an indignant lorry. What now? What was quickest? Telephone? Where was the first telephone?

Then he saw the police car. It was humming along fast, without a siren. He touched the brakes gingerly, wrestled the wheel, and swerved crossways into its path.

The police car screamed to a stop and men with cold, angry faces tumbled out.

"I'm Doctor Blain. Here is your bomber." David wouldn't let them speak. There wasn't time. "You got communication?

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Get on it. Quick. Two bombs are planted at Chief Fowler's house. Back door. Front door. Hurry. And stop his daughter. She'll be just coming home. Right now! "

A man in uniform stared for a fraction of a second, then ran back to his seat and picked up his communicator.

Two others stood beside David's car, looking a thousand questions.

" Take this man out and hold him," David said. " He's had his head bashed, but he is no patient of mine. His name is John Barca. Fowler, in the line of duty, shot his brother. He planted the bombs on Fowler's doors."

Strong hands pulled at Barca's body. David was just as glad the man was unconscious. He could see the officer in the police car, talking, talking—sending the warning through the air to other minds.

David got out and hauled Mike March's body back upon the seat. The doctor's patient was in agony. " Doctor? " he said. It was a cry for mercy, help and mercy. It was the cry that David Blain must not ignore.

" Got to get him to the hospital," David said to the police, " right away."

" O.K., doc," they said with a certain respect. " We'll take care of Barca. We'll see you."

David backed, turned and went ahead. He could hear behind him the sound of pain, the sound of weeping. His patients.

But had it been in time? Had the chief met injury or death? Had Maggie gone running home? Into what? Had he been in time?

Doctor Blain did not know and had not waited to be informed. Bitterly, he knew what it was he must do. He couldn't hang around on the highway waiting for messages to return. He couldn't go haring to the chief's house either, to see for himself what had happened to his girl. Other men, dedicated to other things, had their own directing ideas. He must trust to his. As other men must trust him. It was the meaning he saw in his life.

This time, it wasn't easy.

Five forty-five.

He pulled into the receiving dock for emergency patients at six in the morning. Attendants came and helped to get Mike March out of the car. March was as good as unconscious now. Connie was just a ghost, walking in a mist. A meaningless ghost, haunting nobody unless it was herself.

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David helped her into the emergency room. Doctor Parker was there. He and David bent over the injured hand. Decisions were to be made. This was the work and it had to be done.

Oh, God, where was Maggie Fowler? Whatever had happened, it was over. All that was left was to know.

Doctor Parker agreed that they might give the hand another twenty-four hours. Perhaps the new drugs . . . The patient would be watched, and in any case he was in the right place.

Connie lay back in a chair against the wall. Spent. David put his fingers on her wrist. "What now?" she asked him, gasping. Floating. A pawn. Nothing to direct her.

"Just rest," he said to her kindly.

He went to a phone and called Connie's father. "Mr. Miller? David Blain. Connie is here at the hospital. In very bad trouble I'm afraid."

"I'll be right down. Is she ill, Dave?"

"It's her husband, but Connie needs you."

"I'll be there. Thanks. Thanks very much, Dave." Connie's father seemed to understand.

David turned from the phone. A nurse was giving Connie a cup of coffee. David sent her the responsibility with a nod, and the nurse, with a nod, accepted it.

David had now done all that he ought to do. He ran up the stairs to the hospital's first floor. Joan Dixon was at the switchboard. "Where's Maggie?"

"Oh, she's gone home, doctor. A long time ago."

David turned away. The foyer was dim; very little daylight could get in. The sounds of the working hospital clattered in the branching corridors. But there was nobody here in the dim and silent foyer. He started towards the front portal. He saw a big form coming through, blotting the light.

"Hey, Dave!" Then Chief Fowler was holding David's right hand hard. "You had me on the phone to every big shot in this town. Who'd have thought the big shot was me? But it worked out. The word got to headquarters and I got out of the window. Say, March is here, is he? And listen, where is Maggie?"

David swallowed in a dry throat. "Did they get the bombs?"

"They sure did. Two of them. Mean little gadgets."

"Then she's all right! She must be all right!" David felt a trembling begin.

"She mightn't have been," Chief Fowler said, and his big voice wasn't perfectly steady. "But she didn't come home."

"Dave! Dad! Dave!"

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Maggie came running out of a dark corner. David opened his arms and Maggie, without any hesitation whatsoever, walked into them. "I was in the phone booth—talking to headquarters. So I know . . . what happened. Dad's all right! Dave, you—"

"Sure I'm all right," the Chief said. Then he sent his big feet stepping around them. He had tact. He also had business. He was going to talk to March.

David held on to the girl in his arms. He wasn't going to let her go. "It was you, Maggie, that had me crazy. I found out where the bombs were—I knew you'd be going home."

"How could I go home?" she said. Tears were in her eyes. "I happen—happen to need to be sure that you're all right."

"Me, too," he said. "Need you." And he did. She was his need and his desire. "Maggie, why was it you didn't go home? That you just stayed here?"

"That's simple!" Her square face was illuminated and beautiful. "I knew where you'd be. If you could be."

"You knew—" he choked.

Maggie curved her hand at the back of his head. "Oh, Dave, of course I knew. You had a patient for the hospital. Don't I know what you live by? Don't you think I understand?"

QUICK PEPYS!

Jan. 13th, 1668: Stopped at Martin's, my bookseller, where I saw the French book which I did think to have had for my wife to translate, called *L'escholle des filles*, but when I came to look in it, it is the most bawdy lewd book that ever I saw . . . so that I was ashamed of reading it, and so away home.

Feb. 8th: To my bookseller's, and there staid an hour, and bought the idle rogueish book, *L'escholle des filles:* which I have bought in plain binding, avoiding the buying of it better bound, because I resolve, as soon as I have read it, to burn it, that it may not stand in the list of books, nor among them, to disgrace them if it should be found.

Feb. 9th (Lord's Day): I to my chamber, where I did read through *L'escholle des filles*, a lewd book, but what do no wrong once to read for information sake . . . And after I had done it I burnt it, that it might not be among my books to my shame, and so at night to supper and to bed.

SAMUEL PEPYS, *Diary*

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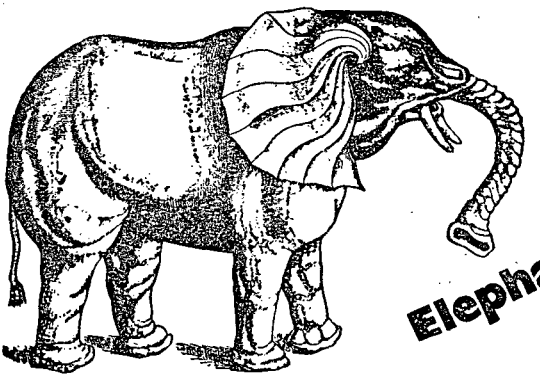

The elephant hath joints, but none for courtesy:
his legs are legs for necessity, not for flexure.
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Troilus and Cressida*

Lovely girls in spangled pants
Ride on gilded elephants.
Elephants are useful friends,
They have handles on both ends;
They hold each other's hindmost handles
And flee from mice and Roman candles.
Their hearts are gold, their hides are emery,
And they have a most tenacious memory.
OGDEN NASH, *The Big Tent Under the Roof*

Stricken

I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him . . .

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick—one never does when a shot goes home—but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time . . . he sagged flabbily to his knees.

GEORGE ORWELL, *Shooting an Elephant*

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Pranged Proverb I

An elephant never forgets,
But then, is an elephant told
To stop for a pound of butter,
The kind with the label of gold,

Drop in, on the way, at the cleaner's
And see if the clothes are ready,
Get the films that were left at the drugstore,
And phone Mary Lou and Freddy?

An elephant never forgets,
From Jan. to the end of December,
But oh, what a very little
An elephant has to remember!

RICHARD ARMOUR, *No Elephant, I*

Boomerang

Hannibal's total force was probably about 55,000 men. Scipio, even with the addition of Masinissa's 10,000, commanded at most about 36,000.

The battle opened with the charge of the elephants, but as the great animals pounded across the space separating the two armies, there rose from the Roman line the jarring blast of hundreds of war trumpets, accompanied by such a tremendous shout that many of the beasts took fright, turned and crashed into their own lines with an impact which sent men flying in terror. Some broke in among the Numidians, stampeding the horses, and as the cavalrymen strove to reform for their charge, the Roman left wing stormed in among them, for Laelius, who commanded the Italian horse, was quick to profit from the Carthaginian disaster.

Some of the elephants reached the Roman lines and did much damage . . .

LEONARD COTTRELL, *Enemy of Rome*

Habitual Gear

A tail behind, a trunk in front,
Complete the usual elephant.
The tail in front, the trunk behind,
Is what you very seldom find.

If you for specimens should hunt
With trunks behind and tails in front,
That hunt would occupy you long;
The force of habit is so strong.

A. E. HOUSMAN, *The Force of Habit*

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Pink and Daintie

The Elephant will forbeare drinke eight daies together, and drinke wine to drunkennesse like an Ape. It is delighted above measure with sweet savours, oyntments, and smelling flowers, for which cause their keepers will in the Summer time lead them into the medowes of flowers, where they of themselves will by the quickness of their smelling, chuse out and gather the sweetest flowers, and put them into a basket if their keeper have any.

EDWARD TOPSELL, *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes*, 1607

Trunk-lines

Q: Why do elephants paint their toenails yellow?

A: So that they can float upside-down in custard.

Back to earth!

"Ivan Nikitich, please don't shout . . . Obviously what you say is true . . . but please, not in the street . . ."

Ivan Nikitich turned towards him, stopping dead in the middle of the pavement. Some passers-by looked at him with curiosity.

"I'm not shouting. I'm expressing myself, that's all. I am speaking to the men responsible for the Soviet movie-making and I'm telling them: Enough! Comrades of the Soviet movie industry, there's got to be a change! Why don't our studios send a few teams to Africa, where there are still elephants at liberty? Let us see them, let them be shown to us on our screens, let us at least have a chance to look at that once before we die . . . Comrades show us some elephants! A charge of elephants, crashing through everything, knocking everything over, smashing everything to pieces, sending everything sky high, blowing the whole damn thing up, the devil may take me, and not to be stopped by anything! Anything! The earth trembles, the forests part, the barriers crumble . . . That's what we expect of the Soviet movie industry, comrades . . ."

Someone laid a hand on his arm . . .

"Will you move on, comrade, instead of causing a crowd. . ."

ROMAIN GARY, *The Roots of Heaven*

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Something glistening dark broke the surface

MANHUNT

BY ROBERT EDMOND ALTER

A FISH eagle coasted down from the turquoise, cleared a green belt of maiden cane, and made a tentative pass at something it saw in the water, then veered off sharply, leaving an expanding dimple on the dark surface. It winged high over Jube Wiggs and banked for the cypress barrier.

The old man squinted, raising his grizzled head to the sun, and followed the bird's flight. He knew he hadn't scared the eagle, because the swamp creatures had long ago accepted him in their brotherhood; some like 'gators, with suspicion; some, like cottonmouth snakes, with cold hate; and others, like jorees, with absent-minded friendliness; but most of them with plain indifference. "It's because I don't use no gun," as Jube often explained it, "'less a panther comes at me."

No, he hadn't scared the eagle, but the strangers had—the two dozen men with rifles and shotguns, and the bloodhounds, and the police boat with its hoot-toot whistle. "Enough to spook anything or anybody," Jube allowed.

The men were after Chad Page; Jube knew that. He let the oars trail absently in the water, let the boat drift while he thought of the boy who was hiding or running somewhere in the vast boggy wilderness.

Chad was a professional alligator hunter. A dead 'gator didn't have much value, so those fellows went after them alive, with shovels and ropes; and when the ropes failed it was Chad's job to get in the water and wrestle the 'gator ashore, barehand.

"And he was good at it too," the old man murmured. "He shore was." A strong youth with arms on him like slick-peeled tree limbs . . . too strong.

Two years before there had been a dance down at Crab's Corners, and Willy Fergus, drunk and mean, had gone after

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Chad with a knife. The law said Chad shouldn't have hit Willy the way he did, between the eyes. The Law said Chad knew his fist could kill a bull, and Willy Fergus had been a far cry from a bull.

And now Chad had escaped from the state prison farm and had fled back to the 'gator-ground . . .

Jube stroked two-three times with the port oar to miss a tussock, and settled into thought again. He remembered Chad as a boy. Nice little fellow, always fooling around the edge of the swamp like he was looking for something, like the swamp was a golden secret and he just had to get to the heart of it.

"Wonder how far he'll git at now?" Jube asked the floating blue bonnets.

A shout startled the old man. "Hi, Jube! Over here!"

Five men were drifting in a skiff in the broad slough before the mouth of Dead Yank Creek. They were armed, and Jube recognised the widest of them to be Sheriff Parks. Jube brought his boat alongside and two of the men captured his gunwale to hold him fast.

Sheriff Parks was polishing his moon face with a bandanna.

"Afternoon, Jube. You see airy of Chad Page hereabouts?"

Jube nodded to the others, though he didn't know any of them. They looked like they'd missed a night of sleep and the skeeters had been at them some.

"No, I ain't. Just seen your fellas about, is all." He glanced towards the mouth of the creek significantly. "You aiming to go up Dead Yank, Jim?" he asked.

Sheriff Parks seemed to think that question a poser. He squinted his eyes first at the breach in the cypress and cane, then at his men.

"I don't guess we will just yet, Jube," he said finally. "Chad cain't reach the creek less he has him a skiff, and so far ain't no boats bin reported stole."

"Well," one of his men muttered darkly, "I ain't fixing to go up that creek and lose *myself*. Fellas say they's cotton-mouths bigger'n a man's neck in there. Say a man kin go stark mad in two hours does he git hisself caught in the pin-downs. And say your right foot kin be tromping ground like rock while your left is sinking in quicksand."

Sheriff Parks gave the dissenter a hard look. "Hank, see kin you give that jaw a rest, will you? I didn't say we was going at her, did I?" He looked at Jube again. "No, I say Chad's still fooling around the scrub oak. It's them state boys want us to go charging clear through the swamp. But then them

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tie-wearing fellas don't know what you and me do about this here old slough, eh, Jube?"

The old man nodded and pushed off from the side of the sheriff's boat. He had no desire to extend the conversation because he knew they would leave him shortly, and then he'd be more lonely than ever.

He rowed around a bend of palmettos, then, alone and out of sight, drifted again. Bonnets whispered alongside the skiff, and a black-hooded joree went hop-skipping across the mud of the nearest bank, chirping away in its foolish fashion. Jube sagged his head and seemed to listen.

His boy, Billy, had been killed in some far-off place called Tar-wa—Jube never could get the correct sound of it—and Milly Mae, his wife, had followed two years later—broken heart, it seemed. And that had been a long time ago. He was a lonely old man, tired, and sometimes it seemed pointless to go on. Once he'd trapped 'coon and otter for profit; now he did it disinterestedly, merely to sustain life.

Life . . . He looked overboard at the dark water and closed his eyes. He'd thought about that also, too many times maybe. Folks said it was wrong, said there was a Law against it—and that seemed funny when you stopped to think of it.

Well, he wasn't going to think of it, not now. Sheriff Parks had enough on his hands without Jube giving him more to worry after. He began stroking the water evenly, cutting the prow of the boat through the stillness. But a thought came to him and he paused, looking up at the cypress wall.

"Chad," he whispered, as though his voice and thought had the power of omnipresence, "you shore making a mistake. Man ain't born kin live in this swamp alone." He paused, then pushed the thought one step further. "Ain't born, I reckon, kin live nowhere *alone*."

Jube's home was a one-room house on a raft. He kept it moored in a secluded five-acre pool, a quiet walled-in hide-hole. Two acres of the pool were carpeted with water lettuce suggesting a clipped lawn, and above, beards of Spanish moss draped the cypresses, giving the impression of hoary giants waiting for eternity's end in mute apathy.

Once he had loved this place; once it had pulsated with laughter, guitar song, and love. Now it was like a damp tomb, and he felt already dead.

He secured the skiff to the stern of the houseboat and hauled himself wearily to the back porch, his open workshop. This is where he did the skinning. The pelts he hung on the rear wall

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of the shanty—'coon pelts on square racks and mink on narrow frames. Little Billy used to stand right there to watch and learn the trade, a long time ago.

Jube shook his head and went on down the port walk to the door. It was shadowy, still, and with a trace of mustiness inside his house. "Some day now," he murmured, "got to stir me up the interest to dust her a speck." But he knew he wouldn't. There didn't seem to be any reason for it.

He found a match, scraped it on the underside of the table, and held the flame to the lamp-wick. A warm yellow glow expanded, pushing the corners and angles of the room into soft brown shadows. And then Jube froze, statue-stiff, like a hound that's just poked its sensitive nose into a belt of scent. He was so attuned to swamp sounds that any foreign noise, even the merest suggestion of noise, was instantly captured by his ears. And now it was the sound of a stranger's breathing.

Jube turned and looked at Chad Page.

The boy was against the door wall. He was black-wet from muddy shoes to belt-line, and the prison shirt had been half clawed from his body, which showed that he'd had a time for himself out in the hurrah and titi and hoop bushes. He held a barlow knife in his right hand, out from the waist. The blade was slick-new and the lamplight ran along the edge like a thin line of pale blood.

"Wiggs," the boy said, and then he put conviction in his words by allowing pauses between them, "you come at me, and shore as mud's soft, I'll cut you. Ain't no reward on me—so no sense in gitting yourself pig-stuck fer nothing."

Jube wasn't consciously afraid of death, but it had to be in his own way, in his own time. He didn't hanker to catch it from a knife.

"You think I'd *sell you*, boy?" he asked, and he put a hint of the hurt he felt into the question. "Wasn't it me learnt you to find turtle eggs when you was but eight? Wasn't it me learnt you how to bring down a curlew with a lightwood?"

Chad nodded, studying the old man with reflective eyes. "That's so. But there's I-don't-know-how-many men out there right now trying to cut across on me and run me down like a fox. You'll allow I got some cause to be leery?"

"Not from me you ain't." Jube spoke stiffly.

Chad lowered the knife and skirted his troubled eyes over the room. "I got in here just afore you come," he explained. "I was fixing to raid your cooler when I heered you oar-ing. I

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need rations, and need me a change of clothes. Hound dogs is after these I got."

"All right. See if that rolled-up something in the corner won't go for a shirt. I reckon you like gravy on your grits?"

It was a checkered flannel and a tight fit, for the boy had a chest like the bull 'gators he'd once fought. But he grinned and said, "Feels good. It damn shore does!"

They sat across from each other, Chad shovelling food voraciously, not speaking until he was through. Jube picked at his grits. For a long time now he'd had little interest in eating.

"How old will you be now, Chad?"

"Twen'y-one come spring, reckon."

"Are you aiming on spending the rest of your life alone in here?"

Chad looked at him. "Ain't aiming on spending it on no farm harrowing out 'bacca furrows."

"But they only give you one-to-five, less good behaviour. Even at worst you'd only went for three more years."

"That's easy come for you to say, and you on the outside!"

Jube gave that some thought, decided there might be something in it. "Didn't they treat you kind in there, Chad? Was the rations bad?"

"N-no, they treated me right, and the rations was prime."

"Well then, I don't see . . ."

Chad pushed up to his feet, his sudden show of agitation cutting Jube short. The boy took two-three aimless steps about the room, and finally flapped his hands at his sides in a gesture of helplessness.

"I could've done it," he said, "if it hadn't bin fer being alone." He came back to the table and looked at Jube. "I ain't got me no folks, Jube. My girl, she run off with a Yankee drummer last year—you heered about that? Well, I don't know kin I explain it to you so you'll see that a man locked up with a couple hundred other fellas is still alone. But that's how it was, Jube. It shore was.

"Didn't have nobody could write me. Didn't have nobody would come see me on visit day. But what was worst was I didn't have me nobody to come back to. Didn't have nobody was waiting fer me. You follow along there? Seems like I was doing my time fer nothing, fer no purpose. And I got to thinking on her, and thinking, and come at last to figure that do I got to be alone, be better I'm really alone, and be where I belong—here on 'gator-ground. And I just pure-out run fer it."

Old Jube stared at his plate and thought about aloneness.

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"Chad, you sorry about killing Willy Fergus?"

Chad straightened up, tilting his head and eyes to the cobwebby rafters. He took time before answering.

"Yes," he said finally, "I am. Sorry I done hit him so hard. But he was coming at me with that knife of his, and I got mad, and well—I was purely scared too, I ain't 'shamed to admit it, and I give Willy everything I could find in me right between the eyes." He looked down at Jube again. "But I ain't a killer, Jube. You know I ain't that. I ain't mean."

Somewhere a night-running hound loosed a sad, trombone bay.

Chad reached for his knife, listening. "They just ain't goan give up, be they? Listen here, old man, I need your help. Need me some of your rations and your skiff. Cain't git where I'm going withoutn it."

Jube watched the boy. "Where would that be, Chad?"

"Be dog if I see where that's any of your nevermind."

"Maybe not. But I reckon it ain't no great secret neither. You fixing fer Dead Yank."

There was a pause of stillness between them. And as it grew Jube felt uncomfortable in it and became defensive. "Well, doggit, if I had me to run and hide and wanted me to a place where maybe nobody would think to look, nor yet have the gumption to look, I'd properly give some thought to Dead Yank Creek."

Chad put the point of the knife on the table, pressing a quarter-inch dent in the soft wood. "Jube," he said quietly, "if I thought you might git 'em on me . . ."

"You'd what?" the old man cried angrily. "You just now done told me you ain't no killer. You done swore you ain't mean. So what would you be about to do to me? No call fer you to git bossified. I ain't aiming to tell 'em nothing. But I tell you something, Chaddy. You keep on thisaway, a-giving them cause to shag you with dogs and guns, and you shore goan end up mean. You goan end up being a real killer, now I tell you!"

"Jube, you always bin good to me, and I respect you fer heaps. But if you done went to rooting around in your brain-box that I'm goan stand here and let you talk me back into that prison, you damn shore better fetch you another think! I plain ain't going."

The old man said nothing more. He sat pensively with his corncob pipe and watched Chad fill a gunny sack with rations. The boy found Jube's old .303 carbine and a box of cartridges,

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and said, " I'll fetch this along. I ain't fixing to git myself panther-et some night."

He returned to the table with sack, carbine, and shells.

" Wish they was a way I could square-up at you fer all this. Tell you what. That Dead Yank is pure unplayed when it comes to hunting 'coon and otter. Bet a purty they be a gracious fortune in hides waiting up there right now. When I git to where I'm a-going I'll do you some trapping. Then maybe sometime we kin arrange to meet up and I'll give you them hides. How does that set? "

Jube nodded. " All right, Chad. That's pleasurable to me."

Chad held out his hand. " Jube, I'd admire to shake good-bye."

But Jube ignored the hand and stood up. " Don't reckon as how we're ready to say good-bye just yet," he said.

" How's that? "

" I'm going with you. How you expect me to git my skiff back if you take her up there alone? I'll row you far's you want, then bring myself back. That way won't nobody see I'm missing my skiff and come to think you went and stole her to git up Dead Yank. You see? "

Chad saw, but he didn't seem to like the arrangement. " You'd go up Dead Yank with me? " he asked. " You know what all they say about that creek. You ain't a-feered? "

" No, I ain't. Air you? "

The boy shrugged. " All right then, I reckon that's best."

" Reckon it be."

The night was moonbright and a-twitter with little cries, flurries, and flutterings. Above and beyond, the palmettos stood like a shaggy row of ebony silhouettes; and along the sandbanks, and in the maiden cane and pin-downs, little night-hunting and hunted creatures went scurrying and splashing; and once something large slid from a hummock and went *spang* in the water.

" 'Gator," Chad muttered needlessly. He was sitting forward in the skiff with the carbine across his lap. Jube was standing aft, stobbing. They moved quietly, leaving only a small purling of water behind. A flock of night-feeding ducks paddled off indignantly at the boat's approach, and a moment later a chimp-faced owl squatting overhead in a tupelo tree asked them the inevitable question—hoo? Hoo?

Chad watched the moony sky apprehensively, saying, " Reckon it ain't goan dew up at all." And fifteen minutes later he had cause for alarm. A skiff approached them, coming downstream

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on the far side of a tussock rise. They had a fire bucket going in the bow, and one of them stirred the embers with a lightwood torch and held the wad of frying pitch aloft, making an island of saffron that fell on their heads and turned their erect gunbarrels into slim rods of gold.

"Hi! Where at y-all going?"

Jube felt a rope of sick fear twist a half hitch in his stomach. He didn't want them to try and take Chad—not when the boy was sitting there as dangerous as a stepped-on rattler with the carbine.

"Sheriff wanted us to go for a last turn about Backin Bay," Jube called with sudden inspiration. "You fellas going down fer the night?"

They were, and Jube claimed he'd be along presently. And then the skiffs were far apart and the little ball of light winked out. Chad chuckled and looked over his shoulder. "Bet foxhounds couldn't catch you fer trickiness, Jube."

The old man stobbed without a word. No one had to tell him he had a trick or two up his sleeve.

The creek had a bad name, and it had a legend. Away back in history a hunted Yankee spy stole a skiff and fled up the twisted little waterway. The four Rebs that followed him lost their skiff, their guns, boots, and half their clothes. It took them a week to claw their way back to civilisation, and they returned with haunted eyes and tall tales.

They told of man-eating cottonmouth snakes, of skeeters bigger than pencils, of pin-down bushes that writhed like snakes, groping blindly through the mud for human prey; of morasses that would swallow boats, panthers as large as cattle, and of a bull 'gator that was the grandfather of all 'gators, with a mouth like a cave-opening and teeth like barlow knives. They never did find the Yank— "'Gator-et," they said.

Bonnets rustled alongside, a frog burped *barrump*, and a distant wildcat yowled a dismal note. Jube grunted, easing the pole in his hand. The creek didn't seem so bad to him—it was like any other part of the swamp. The trouble with men, he decided, was too much imagination—that, and their roots that reached deep into the mud and stirred up superstition. A slough was a slough, and all of them were dangerous.

Chad lifted the damp sack from the fire bucket and set a torch ablaze. He studied the near sandbanks in the spreading circle of light. "Let's put in here, Jube," he called. "Ain't nobody goan come at us tonight."

Jube put the prow of the skiff ashore, and Chad slogged

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up the rise of land to a strip of clearing that fronted a thicket-wall of titi and tupelo. He squatted and felt the earth with his hand, looking for 'gator-ground. There was only one thing worse than cutting a 'gator off from water—that was cutting a bear off from the bush.

"No 'gators here," he called. "Let's camp."

They made a fire of lightwood, boiled some coffee, and settled back on their bedrolls with their pipes. Overhead the moon was gold-dollar bright and just as round.

"Jube, you reckon city folk never see a moon like that?"

"Reckon they don't, poor fellas."

Chad stretched and gave a long grunt of satisfaction. "Jube, this ain't so bad, eh? Wouldn't you call it pleasant-like?"

Jube nodded. "Nothing wrong with this here at all—fer *two* folks. But t'would be hell on ungreased wheels fer a man alone."

Chad made a face. "Let's not start that again. Let's just enjoy this some while we got her. I don't want to think of being alone."

"But you got to start thinking on her some time, boy. It's coming fer you like a madman with an axe. Man weren't meant to live alone, Chaddy. I know. I bin trying her fer fifteen year. *Everybody* got to need him *somebody*. God just shore enough made us thataway."

"Well, I ain't got me nobody!" the boy cried angrily. "That's bin my whole trouble. And ain't no sense in fussing about what you ain't got and cain't git. Now hush on it, will you?"

Jube looked at the boy. He started to say something, but didn't. His eyes went wide, then darted sideways to the carbine that lay nearby in the saw-grass. He reached for it slowly, picked it up, and eased a shell into the chamber. "Don't move, Chad," he said softly.

Chad stiffened. His eyelids narrowed to two fire-bright slits. "Jube—Jube, you wouldn't . . . not *you*, Jube."

The old man brought the gun up, drawing a bead. "Don't breathe. They's a cottonmouth coiled on a stump right back your neck."

"Jube," the boy whispered, "you shore God better be telling the truth, 'cause it 'pears to me *you drawing aim on my head.*"

"Close your eyes, boy—here comes."

The shot echoed, rolled, caroming off the water. Chad lunged sideways, leapt to his feet, and spun about. In the dark grass a five-foot cottonmouth coiled, uncoiled, squirmed into a knot and thrashed, its crimson head shattered.

Chad came for Jube, clutching at his shoulders. "Jube," he

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cried. "I'm sorry. I'm before-God sorry. I pure-out thought you . . ."

"I know what you thought," the old man said gruffly.

Chad looked back at the trembling grass. He seemed embarrassed.

"I guess you the only true friend I ever had me," he murmured.

"Yes," Jube said, "a friend is a handy thing."

In the morning, as the young bull 'gators stood in the shallows and thundered defiance at the new day, Jube and Chad shoved off from the sandbank.

It was slow moving in the sluggish-flowing water, as they paddled and stobbed the skiff up the little black creek, with the tussocks and morasses under the bow and the jungle growth hanging so low it sometimes brushed its moss in their eyes.

Young 'gators watched them from the water with wary suspicion, sinking before the bow and rising again in the wake to hiss wetly after them. A poor-joe bird scolded them for no apparent reason, and two big round-butted bears working a bee tree paused to wrinkle their snouts, trying to determine the man-scent.

Maiden cane stood erect in the sandbanks like green troops awaiting inspection, and tall cypress fluttered as though waving, while the slim cabbage palms nodded in unison. And the silence bulged like a mute monster staring stupidly at them from the damp wilderness.

Then there was a spreading bogland of petrified logs, soggy stumps, dead leaves, and stagnant water. And once there was a vast meadow of water lettuce, the green rosettes so thick on the surface the water was completely obscured. They had to wade then, waist-high, Chad pulling on the bow, Jube pushing the stern. Twice the old man felt something bump his legs, wrap around, and wiggle on. He didn't mind. He knew the moccasins wouldn't strike under water.

In the early noon they paddled into a great shadow-still pool. A cool draught of air came from somewhere and passed across their sweat-damp heads, and flowed on to the thickets to stir the colour splotches, the ivy trumpets, pink hurrahs, and white Cherokee roses. It was a lonely place, and lost.

"Jube," Chad whispered, "it's church-like, ain't it now? More'n that—like . . . what they call them big shebangs . . . cathedrals?"

"Maybe so. But I ain't never seen me one."

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Something long, glistening dark and scutted, broke the surface in a floating bed of golden-heart. Jube caught his breath and pointed. "Chaddy—looky there. Just you look at the size of that 'gator!"

It was a monster, and it skimmed across the water towards them with a lack of caution that was frightening. They saw its treading paws sag limp as the flat head raised slightly and it opened its great jaws. The two men stared down the dark tunnel of throat.

"Lord o' the jay-birds!" Chad breathed. "He'll go fer a grandpappy."

Jube felt uneasy. He didn't know why—he was used to 'gators, even big ones. But there was something about this bull that struck him as prophetic. "You don't think he could be . . ."

Chad picked that up instantly. "Gowan!" he sneered. "'Gators don't live that long. I've seen 'em his big afore—never fought one, though. And don't know as I aim to. Let's paddle."

They left the pool, following a waterway that was muck-bordered and thick with stunted bays, paint-bushes, and titi. But when Jube looked back he saw the great 'gator tailing in their wake. He said nothing about it to Chad.

Ain't goan git me superstitious on it, he thought. *Got me other problems 'sides 'gators.*

Chad ceased paddling, straightened up to stare ahead at the wilderness. "Jube," he called. "Know what I'm fixing at? Goan work me clear up to the head of Dead Yank. Goan see me just what's there." Then he laughed boyishly and looked back at the old man.

"Cain't tell, Jube. Just might find that lost fountain of youth men bin a-looking fer."

"Might find the backend of the earth too."

"Ain't no telling. But I just got it to do. You with me?"

Jube nodded soberly. "Reckon. Ain't got me nowhere particular to go at."

The boy grinned. "Be dog—we'll do her then!"

Abruptly, the long sad bay of a hound reached them, hanging them in glassy suspension for a trembly moment. Then Chad cried, "That's too close fer comfort. They on me again, Jube!"

The old man nodded, staring. "Must have found our fire this morning," he said. "Chad, don't try to run 'em. Sheriff Parks will be coming with four-five men stroking to a skiff. He'll haul you—"

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" Shush up! Hear? They ain't taking me back. I done fixed my mind on that point." Chad looked around desperately at the grim landscape. A myriad of maiden cane, roots, pin-downs, cypress knees, and log litter spread confusedly on either hand. He reached for the carbine. " I'll give 'em a walk they won't forgit," he said grimly.

Jube was nonplussed. He hadn't expected the sheriff to catch them so soon—not before he'd really been given a chance to show Chad the mistake he was making. " Don't, Chad! " he shouted. " You'll kill yourself shore in them pin-downs."

Chad ignored him. He stepped from the bow on to a morass and sank to his knees. " Don't just sit there! " he shouted wildly. " Git going! Staying there is just giving them a jumping-off place on me! " He turned and started slogging towards the high ground. The hooped roots of the pin-downs tripped him over twice before he could cover fifteen feet.

Jube closed his eyes, feeling sick and helpless. Then he turned and looked at the water. The great 'gator was coasting in cautiously now, its bump-eyes wide and curious. A hound bayed, and another. Jube closed his eyes again.

He would never be certain just what happened next. One moment he was sitting limp in the stern of the skiff, the next he was toppling overboard.

He had time to shout just once—" *Chad!* "—and then he was under and lost in the deep water.

In his mind—no, in his stomach, which sucked in with screaming fear—he felt the 'gator rush at him. Then something slammed along his twisting legs and he was caught in a thrash of whipped water. It was the teeth he felt the most, felt them clear through his quivering body, even though they hadn't yet touched him.

God, he thought, *I shore tried to do it right.*

He came up on the port side of the skiff, gasping, dizzy, blear-eyed. Far down the waterway a shout hollowed th air. Jube pawed at his eyes and saw one of the sheriff's skiffs coming fast. But a hurricane of noise was breaking right behind him.

He looked and saw the bull 'gator rolling white-chest up through cane, roots, and shallows. The bull hissed, churning water, and flipped again. Chad swung into view, clinging leechlike to the sparkling corrugated back.

" Git out! " he screamed at Jube. " Git! I cain't hold him! "

Jube started wading, tripping, towards Chad and the 'gator. " Yes you kin, Chad! " he shouted. " You the best damn 'gator-fighter in the swamp! You kin take him, boy! "

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The 'gator swivelled its body in a giant pivot, and the armoured tail cut Jube's legs right out from under him. He went down, under . . . but he sloshed up and forward again, and lunged on to Chad's back. Together they grappled for the 'gator's vulnerable spot—the jaws. Their faces came together, wild-eyed, and Chad was swearing.

"You the most fool-stubborn old man I ever see! Why didn't you clear out when I told you? We cain't never walk this granpappy ashore! Now we got to hang to him like death till help come!"

Jube said nothing. He gritted his teeth and held on. He knew what he was doing.

Sheriff Parks, three-four of his men, Chad, and Jube stood in a circle on a peaty morass and looked at the trussed and helpless 'gator.

"That's real 'gator-bawling," the sheriff crowed. "And not a mark on him! He'll go fer a pretty price, Chad. I'll see to it."

Chad grunted. "Jube kin hold the money fer me. Half it's hisn."

The old man looked at the sheriff. "Jim, Chad here was on his way to give hisself up when I went and fell overboard. I'd be dead and 'gator-et this minute, Chad hadn't went to save me."

Parks rubbed at his mouth. "You went and fell overboard, eh, Jube? Careless of you, I'd say." Then he chuckled good-naturedly. "Shore, I knowed Chad was fixing to give hisself up all the while. I was just tagging along waiting fer him to git around to it, that's all."

Jube touched Chad's arm, turning him; the others, seeing the gesture, pulled back a bit.

"Chad, I'll be coming at you every visit day. That's a pure promise. And tell you what—I'll have Miss Molly, the schoolmarm, write me up a letter a week fer you. And—" he shrugged, smiled —"and when you done with your time, why, I'll still be here, boy. I'll be waiting right here where I always bin. And, Chad, you and me will go clear-gone to the head of Dead Yank. Just fer the hell on it. Just fer to see what's there."

The boy smiled, putting his hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Jube, how'd you knowed I'd come at you when you went and dunked your-fool-self overboard?"

The old man nodded a straight-face.

"I knowed, Chad. I knowed you would. A friend is a handy thing."

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His eyes met the magician's—everything changed

LAVANA

BY R. K. NARAYAN

THE Pandit this afternoon was reading a newspaper, instead of his usual palm leaf. The afternoon was still, blue and bright, and his favourite calf tethered to a post within his view, had eaten off the dry millet sticks that he had placed for it in a trough.

He put away the newspaper, removed the glasses from his nose and said, " I took a little time to read the account of the man who has been flung into the upper air regions, and has circled the earth—strange trials the *Yavanas* of the western world attempt. Such a man does not wait for the earth to turn towards the sun or away from it, but himself goes round and creates his own night and day. So between his sunset and sunrise, he does not pass through twenty-four hours ; for within this span actually he has three days by the time you pass through one day. All this makes one think again and again of the nature of time. What is a day? What are four days ? What is a lifetime ? I am going to tell you the story of Lavana in this connection . . . "

Once there was an ancient kingdom called Uttar Phandava of which Lavana was the ruler. This was a rich and beautiful country. The king was pleased with his subjects, and the subjects were equally pleased with their ruler. His daily routine consisted in meeting at his assembly hall every afternoon, his ministers, secretaries, visitors and petitioners.

One day at the assembly hall, a stranger had arrived. He was a bare, gaunt man; his forehead was blazoned with holy marks and his shawl was a rare Cashmere one, declaring to one and all that he was an honoured man. On his wrist gleamed a gold band inset with gems ; at his throat was a large-size rosary bead

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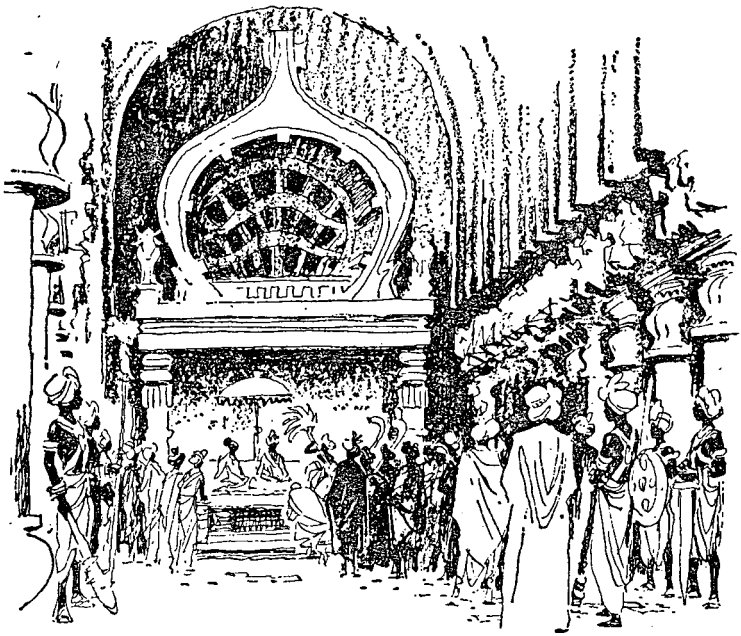

strung in a gold chain ; his head, covered with white hair falling on his nape, struck awe in anyone beholding him. They seated him amid learned men.

The king could not take his eyes off him. He asked the Prime Minister, " Who is he ? "

" A magician, who wants an audience."

" Let him come forward."

The magician came on with a flourish.

The king asked, " What can you do ? Let it be something new."

The magician said, " I want to perform a feat which none else could have thought of . . . "

The king smiled cynically and said, " I've seen a mango tree develop fully under a towel. I don't want to see it again."

" This will be different, Your Majesty."

" I don't want to see a rope crawl up in midair with someone climbing it."

" That's a tiresome, banal trick ; I won't inflict it on Your Majesty."

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Narayan is regarded today as India's top writer, but among his own people he is thought a saint. His answer to this is that he is a writer—and to be a good writer anywhere one must have deep roots both in religion and family.

His books and stories are always written in English but never rely on Anglicised Indians or British characters to people them, and always, his stories have a definite ring of true India.

From his new collection of short stories adapted from Sanskrit legends, Argosy has chosen Lavana, for it best illustrates the years of tradition behind both story and writer.

" I have often witnessed the dead skins of a cobra and a mongoose come to life and fight."

" I performed it when I was a boy of eight. I would not inflict such a worn-out entertainment on this august assembly."

" Would you do something new ? I cannot tolerate the sight of any woman being sawn-off, nor that anyone rise from the floor and float to the roof : I'm tired and sick of all this show."

" Your Majesty may order my head to be cut off if I do no more than that."

" Why ? Have you so little use for your head, that you wish to forfeit it so cheaply ? "

" Your Majesty, I know I can perform something different."

" If you succeed, you may ask for the highest reward. Now proceed. Bring out your bag."

" I have no bag."

" That is a good sign. No bag of tricks. Then what have you ? "

" Only these," said the magician, indicating his own eyes and opening them wide.

" Only what ? " asked the king, looking up.

When his eyes met the other's eyes—everything changed. The Prime Minister who always stood on his right faded out of view ; the durbar hall with its golden pillars and carpets and carvings dissolved. The very seat on which the king was sitting was gone . . .

The king found himself all alone in a wide expanse of a field, on which grazed a horse of pitch black colour with a dark mane, a tail streaming down and brushing the earth below. Its eyes rolled wildly and it foamed at its mouth. It was bouncing and

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restless and it capered and cantered and dug the earth with its hoofs and showed every sign of boundless, untamed energy.

The king felt challenged. He caught himself muttering, "If I can't seize and break the horse, I shall be worth nothing." He made cautious approaches to it, but at his approach every time it shied away, tossing back its head and snorting and foaming. To Lavana no other pursuit seemed worthier than this, and led by this sport, he followed the horse. It waited for his approach and bounded off. It repeated this trick again and again. The king enjoyed the thrill of this chase enormously and did not notice how many miles he had strayed away, following it. It drew him after it into strange regions. He felt infuriated, suddenly sprang forward and seized its dark, shaggy mane and heaved himself on its back. And the horse flew.

It whizzed through the air, racing and galloping as if the earth, air, trees, fields and other impediments were just not there. It cut through the air—tore through jungles, trees, and hedges and valleys and meadows. Lavana found himself blinded and breathless as he clung to its back. The king felt suffocated at the speed of the horse ; he dug his heels in, circled his arms around its neck and flattened himself on its back—the horse not only moved horizontally, but also vertically in the air, and the branches of trees scratched his face and hit him on the head. He shot out his arm to ward off a tree branch that threatened to scratch his face and suddenly found himself suspended in midair, clutching the branch.

What terrible things have come upon me, he thought. Where am I ? There was nothing but a green abyss under his feet, and if he dropped down he could not say where he would be landing. He heaved himself on to the cross-arms of the tree and sat there, he knew not how long. He looked up and saw above a family of monkeys. The father lay on his back ; the mother was searching his coat for lice, and the little one was capering up and down, restrained often by one or the other of the parents who pulled him back by his tail to safety. Suddenly all of them stood arrested and kept watching him. Their eyes seemed to mock him.

They are in their own world, and I have strayed in here by mistake, he thought. Who am I anyway ? I was a king. I had authority, a palace and so many who bowed deferentially when I passed, and disappeared when I looked severe, and now here I am on a tree verily like a monkey. Perhaps on a tree the monkey is superior to the king, and I have to accept this status. If I attempt to climb, I am sure the monkeys would climb higher and

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still look down upon me. Before the situation is intolerable let me get out of this place. I would rather perish in whatever may be awaiting me down there.

He looked down. Anything might be there in that wild greenery below! Beasts which might make a mouthful of him, or reptiles or wild men who might want to torture him. He let go his hold and went down, his fall cushioned by the foliage. His face was bleeding from the scratches and his feet ached with the heaviness of the fall, but he felt happy to be back on firm earth, away from the flying horse, and away from the lofty monkeys. He did not know which direction to take, where to go. He paused for a moment, and suddenly started walking. But he had to go somewhere. He walked on and on . . .

When night came, he lay on the ground and fell asleep. He could not judge how many days he had spent thus or how far he had gone. All that he was aware of was the path ahead, and the pain at his joints ; his dress was ragged, he was covered with sores. Hunger and thirst racked him. When he could not move another step, he lay in a faint on the hard ground, hoping to be dead soon. But problems do not end so simply.

He did not know how long he had lain in that faint, but when he opened his eyes, he saw what he took to be a phantom approach him. A young woman stood over him and stared at him with curiosity. She had covered her body with a rag, and carried a little basket in her hand.

He asked, " Who are you ? "

" Why ? " she asked.

He said, " I am hungry, I am thirsty. What have you in that basket ? "

She said, " Food which I am carrying for my father who is chopping wood in the forest."

" What food is it ? "

" The usual one," she said, " nothing for a feast."

" Oh ! give it to me," he cried. " Save me. I am dying ; give me anything."

" It is for my father," said the girl firmly.

" Have you no heart ? "

" No, I have no heart," she said. " Who are you ? "

The king at this point still remembered who he was. He said, " I am a king—er—I used to be a king . . . Forget all that. Give me that food, I will reward you when I am back in my kingdom."

The woman said, " If you are a king, I am not one. I am of the lowliest class. My father is a *Chandala* ! We cannot give you

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any food. I would be committing a sin if I gave you the food contaminated by my touch. I do not want to commit this sin and go to hell. You belong to the *Kshatria* caste. I belong to the lowliest *Chandala* caste."

The king said, " Forget that I mentioned the word king. I am a *Chandala* actually. I was joking with you. Do I look like a king ? "

She said, " I don't care what you look like. This is the flesh of a hog, which I have cooked with a little wild rice and greens gathered from the jungle." As she went on referring to the food, though it was an unsavoury combination of things, his mouth watered.

" Please describe your food."

She described how they hunted the wild boar whose flesh she had cooked. How a number of persons from her hamlet went after the beast and speared it to death and brought home the remains and shared it among themselves, how she cooked it with wild grains found in the fields, and how she larded it, how she dried the flesh in the sun and preserved it in a pot buried underground and so forth.

The king felt desperate and said, " I am dying. Give me that food."

She said, " No, I am doing what is proper for my caste. I cannot violate the code which says that I should not feed someone of higher caste. I do not want to go to hell. If you are dying of hunger, I can't help you."

The king fell at her feet and said, " Take pity on me. Save me."

She said, " I can save you on condition that you do what I say. If you marry me you become my equal and then I can give you all the food you want. But first let me speak to my father."

The king thought it over ; the proposal seemed simple, sound and perfectly reasonable. He said, " All right, I will come with you to see your father ; but I am unable to walk. I am very tired."

" If you are tired you will have to get more tired, that is all. If you want to make that an excuse not to marry me, you may die of hunger, that is all."

" Oh ! Woman, you mistake me. I do want to marry you. I adore you. I will come with you."

When they reached the heart of the forest where a shrunken old man was chopping wood, the girl explained the situation.

The father asked the girl, with his eyes on the king, " You want to marry this man ? "

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The girl said, " I do not want to marry anyone, but he must be saved."

The father looked at the king and said, " Do you want to marry this dirty girl ? She is hare-lipped, ugly, uncouth, she is a *Chandala* woman. She was born to a concubine of mine. I do not remember who her mother was. But if you want to marry her, I will not object."

The king blurted out, " I want food."

The woodcutter said, " You will get food when you are her husband."

In course of time the king was quite well settled as the son-in-law of the old woodcutter and lived with the family in a hut roofed with coconut thatch. One evening the woodcutter died : the next day, they buried him in their yard and the king became the head of the family. He speared the forest animals, skinned them with his own hands, and maintained the food supply at home. Sometimes he went into the forest to cut wood. Gradually he lost all memory of his identity. If anyone had asked him who he was, he would have said, " I am of course a hunter living in the forest married to this lovely woman." He had become blind not only to his own identity, but also to that of the *Chandala* hare-lipped woman. He had become her slave and as years passed she bore him four sons. He clothed himself in tree-barks, his hair was matted and long, and his nails were grown claw-like.

A great famine struck the land, and all vegetation dried up. All the water in the ponds was gone. Most of the animals had moved away, and the few that were caught in this famine-stricken corner of the world lay dead and were so parched that there was no flesh in them to eat. The trees stood gaunt and bare and one day a small fire started in a bamboo thicket, came raging down the entire area, and Lavana with his family had to move off. The king carried on his head a basket filled with oddments of the household such as hunting-knives, spears, some dried skins and a few ragged clothes.

His sons were fairly grown up now. He told them, " My boys, I cannot support you any longer. You will have to fend for yourselves. Do not follow me, but go your own ways."

At this, the wife flew at him, " How dare you talk to the children in this manner. Have you no heart—to turn them out ? "

" Children ! Children ! " the king cried. " They used to be children. They are old now. Do you not see that the oldest is middle-aged ? Do they look like children to your eyes ? "

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"Yes, they do!" said the woman. "And it is your business to keep them as long as they want to be with us. I want all my children to be with me." And so they moved without breaking up. The king detested his first three sons who always seemed to sit around their mother and chatter away, looking to him to bring food and water.

The king was deeply attached to his youngest son who was now twenty.

They walked and walked without food or water until a time came when the family could proceed no longer . . .

One by one the first three sons deserted when they found that their father could support them no more. The king became extremely weayr. He was lashed by his wife's comments every now and then: "What a man you are! When you could not support a family, why should you have married? Did you think that you could throw away the children when they were born? Oh! You monster! You have driven away those three children. I do not know where they are."

The king bore it all patiently. He merely said, "We will come to rest somewhere. We cannot go on like this. There must be a green patch somewhere. When we get there and get settled, I will go back and search for the lost sons."

They went on and on. One day the king was tired out, when he saw his son lying almost ready to die. He stood beside the young man as he lay unconscious with hunger. He noticed that the boy's bones were sticking out. He bent over him and said, "Boy, be courageous! I will get you food soon."

The boy whispered, "Where? I see no food. I will die here. I want meat . . . cooked . . . Some meat." He was nearly in a delirium.

The king said, "All right, I will cook you some. Be here." He went over to another corner where his wife was lying and he told her, "Look, I have thought of an idea to provide meat for you and for that child of ours. You stay here and I will come out in about half an hour. You will find meat cooked and ready to be eaten. If you have any salt, sprinkle it on that and eat it."

"What about you?" she asked.

He was touched by her concern for him. For the first time in many days she was showing concern for his feelings. "Do not worry about me. I will manage. But on no account should you ever peep out. You will soon notice a fire outside; when it subsides, you go out and your food will be ready cooked. Meanwhile sleep." He patted his son and said, "You will have food soon, my boy. Sleep in peace."

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The king said, going out, " Be sure to give this boy all the food he wants. All the meat he wants."

Outside he gathered faggots and dried leaves and struck a flint and lit a fire. When it was satisfactorily crackling, he found his wife stirring inside. " Do not look out. You must come only when the fire has died down. Never before." So saying, he jumped into the fire, screaming, " Don't take out the meat before it is well cooked. Have your salt ready."

Now the king woke up. He saw that he was still sitting in his usual seat in the assembly. The ministers were around. He looked about and said, " Have you all been here all this time ? "

The ministers said, " Yes, Your Majesty. We have not moved."

The king said, " I don't understand. How long has it been ? "

The ministers said, " Your Majesty ? "

" How long have I been asleep ? "

" Well, perhaps a minute or two, Your Majesty ; not more than that."

The king cried, " But I passed through seventy years. I passed through a whole lifetime of a span of seventy years. Did I not ? " He looked about and cried, " Where is that magician?"

And everyone looked about, but the magician was gone.

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YOU SEE, I HAVE A PASSION

I know that the only way I am ever going to make any money in this world, apart from winning the pools or inheriting an unexpected fortune, is as a successful writer.

I know that the only way I am ever going to make a successful writer in this world is by putting my nose to the proverbial grindstone and doing some work.

But with that knowledge in mind it is still so hard even to sit down at my typewriter, let alone write anything that anyone will want to buy.

(You see, I have a passion for pretty young girls with pigtails who drive Daddy's big car and drink Coca Cola out of the bottle. It's a weakness I have. I cannot resist them. They excite me. Not uncontrollably, but sufficient to keep me away from my typewriter).

D.A.G.

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STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

BY WILLARD MARSH

DOMINIC kept remembering that the guy in the bar mirror was himself. Not that he had anything against himself, but it meant the liquor wasn't working properly. Which was a sin and a shame because alcohol, after womankind, was mankind's rarest gift. Prudently administered, it made good things rosy, sad things dim, toned up the liver and gilded the lily. So far it had performed none of these miracles.

Dominic considered the man in the mirror. With a little charity, he became a sort of stocky, slightly-ageing version of the current crop of Italian actors. Not exactly goodlooking by Hollywood standards but, well, mature and masculine in a non-cultivated way. A diamond in the rough. But charity required imagination, which in turn required work. And this was precisely what liquor was supposed to eliminate.

In general, a hell of a dull afternoon. If he'd been on duty, it would have been supportable. But this was his day off, the high point of the week, which made it downright criminal.

It began with rain, not the healthy rain that invites a good book and a fire, but a depressing drizzle—the kind Noah might have had the thirty-ninth day at sea, with nothing to break the monotony below decks except swabbing the engine-room and building an addition to the rabbit pen. Dominic had come in out of it to Herman's Grill. Feeling cocky, he'd asked Herman for the dice cup, announcing he would take the pudgy Dutchman for a fast few hands of razzle-dazzle. It had been brutal. He never even got one horse on Herman. Each time he lost he'd buy himself a belt of house Scotch, and Herman, a cigar. After a while Herman had enough cigars to equip the waiting-room of a maternity ward. It was just one of those days when you weren't supposed to win anything, even arguments.

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Taking a last look in the mirror at no one's leading man, Dominic watched him finish his drink, give his larcenous host an ungracious nod and leave. The Scotch would be better at his apartment, and certainly much cheaper. Since he was in no hurry to reach it, he found himself loafing down a sidestreet on an unaccustomed detour. And that was when he saw the sign and felt his luck change.

Madame Zorita, Psychic Consultant

It was hanging in the window of a ground-floor flat, the lettering neat and fresh against the pane as if it hadn't been there long. Whistling, Dominic took the sagging stairs and pushed the bell.

The door was opened too quickly by a short, dark-haired girl in an oriental-looking kimono. The professionally sombre expression on her face—such a nice face—seemed preposterously out of character.

"Are you the Madame?" Dominic asked politely.

"I'm Madame Zorita," she said stiffly. "Won't you come in?"

She led the way to a small parlour. It had been cleared of everything except a card table with facing chairs and a lamp. The table was covered with dark velvet, and held what looked like an inverted fishbowl. The double doors to the rest of the flat were screened with a muslin curtain. The air was close, with a suggestion of incense.

"Won't you be seated?" The girl awkwardly took the chair opposite. "And now, just what is the nature of your troubles?"

"Troubles?" Dominic said in surprise. "Haven't got a trouble in the world."

She looked a little hurt and confused. "Isn't there anything you'd like to ask the spirits? Maybe something pertaining to your lost ones?"

"Oh, the spirits," Dominic said. "Sure, I guess I can put them to work on something."

"Well, the ordinary reading is fifty cents. And then I have a more complete one for a dollar."

"You mean, a better class of spirits?"

"Of course not." She seemed annoyed for some reason. "It's just a longer reading."

"Oh, I see. I guess I'll try that one then."

He passed her a dollar bill and she tucked it in the fold of her kimono. That alone was worth a dollar. Dominic glanced around the bare room.

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" One nice thing about this business," he said conversationally, " I don't suppose you have to meet much of a payroll."

She smiled weakly and reached for the lamp. The room was suddenly dark except for a feeble glow in the glass bowl. Her features gradually emerged—full-mouthed, with a sort of Latin modelling, and long black hair with rich highlights.

" And now, what would you like to ask the spirits? " In the dark, her voice had a warm, tropical quality.

" How about getting their opinion," he said, " on the winner of the fifth at Santa Anita tomorrow? "

" The spirits don't concern themselves with gambling," she said severely.

" Gambling? " Dominic said. " Where's the gamble if they have the winner? "

" I'm sorry. I can only help you with questions of a spiritual nature." The girl shifted uneasily. " Unless you co-operate and hold the right thoughts, it won't work," she said helplessly. " Isn't there anyone from the beyond you'd like to ask about? "

" Gee, I don't know many dead people . . . "

" Try to think back. Someone in your childhood perhaps."

" I didn't make friends easily. I was always pretty much on my own. Besides, I was too old for kids my own age." Dominic could make out her eyes, sober and intent upon his own. " Were you like that too? By yourself a lot as a kid? "

" I guess I was," she said.

" Makes you grow up in a hurry, doesn't it? But after a while it gets lonely. Was it that way for you? "

The girl glanced down at the bowl. " We seem to be getting off the subject."

" Oh sure, I'm sorry." He settled back thoughtfully. " There was one friend I can remember. Name of Howard. Used to talk to him for hours—you know, about kids' things. How old is God, who lives on the moon . . . He died about the time I started school."

" What was his last name? "

" That's funny," Dominic smiled. " I guess I never thought of him as having one."

" All right, now try to concentrate on the way you remember him best." She bent over the bowl, passing her hands across as if to clear it. " Yes . . . Yes, I'm getting something. Murky, though . . . There seems to be a hostile interference."

Dominic nodded sympathetically. " Try a different channel."

" Wait, they're coming through! Closer, *closer* . . . Now I can feel them. The spirits are here! "

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Dominic sat up in alarm.

" *Be still.* They're all around us . . . "

He glanced over his shoulder nervously. The girl gave him an angry look.

" . . . and now I can see a little boy," she said irritably. " I can't quite . . . yes, he's forming. Yes it looks like little Howard. Is that a sailor suit he's wearing? "

" That doesn't sound like Howard," Dominic said doubtfully.

" Wait, he's trying to tell you something." She stared into the shadowed depths. " Howard," she pleaded, " what are you trying to warn your friend against? " She nodded slowly. " All right, Howard, I'll tell him."

She sat back wearily and said in a matter-of-fact voice, "Howard said you're due for some bad luck. You should lay off gambling for a while—especially the horses."

Dominic nodded thoughtfully. " Well, he should know. Is that all? "

" What do you want for a buck? A personal appearance? "

He grinned. " What's the matter, don't the spirits like me? "

" Not especially." The girl's voice came sullenly through the darkness. " You're one of those sceptics."

" Oh no, Miss Zorita," Dominic said, injured. " I only wanted to ask Howard if he's making out all right."

" He's great. Don't lose any sleep."

" Well, I just wondered," he said clumsily. " I thought maybe he still had to pull a milk cart every day."

He heard her inhale, then slowly let her breath out.

" You're a cop, aren't you? "

" I'm afraid I am," he said cheerfully.

The lights came on, her hand dropped from the lamp. The glass bowl was dark again. In the banked light, the girl's face looked tired and resigned.

" I get all the breaks," she said. " The second day, and I draw the law. I can sure pick 'em, can't I? "

" Tough," Dominic said coarsely. He took one of Herman's cigars from his pocket, lit it and put his feet up on the flimsy table.

She gave him a look of contempt. " Get your flat feet off the table." She stood up. " Come on, sport, let's go. You probably got some important assignments. Like catching old ladies picking flowers in the park."

" Don't be insultin' the law," Dominic said, in his idea of a brogue, " or it'll go hard with you." He gave her a slow,

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deliberate once-over. " It isn't every day I catch me a psychic consultant with a little style to her. So I'm after thinkin'," he leered, " that there's a way you can square this rap. If you know what I mean."

" Know what you mean? Why, it's all over your face, you . . . you dirty . . . !"

It was almost impossible to keep from laughing, but he made it.

" Now where did I go puttin' me badge? " Dominic groped in mock alarm through his pockets. " Sure, some dirty crook has stolen it! "

The girl slumped into her chair and began laughing, weakly in relief at first, and then with rich spasms. Finally she was able to speak.

" Lord, you had me sold! I took you for the real thing."

" It's a gift," he said.

" Thanks for being such a good sport."

" Likewise," he said.

" Well anyway—" she reached in her kimono for another dollar's worth—" here's the refund on your admission." She tossed the bill on the table.

" Who's complaining? " He let it lie there. " Tell me, have I really got flat feet? "

" It was an optical illusion," she said.

Beyond the snug, half-shadowed room, they could hear the mistily-dissolving afternoon. He watched her smile privately.

" You and your talking horse," she said. " That was a lowdown trick to pull."

" It's true though. Every word," Dominic said. " Howard and I were great buddies. He had a knack for intelligent listening that I've never run across since. Didn't things like that ever happen to you? "

" I had a dog once," she said, " a moth-eaten little mutt . . . look, what're you trying to do, embarrass me? "

He laughed. " Where'd you pick up this racket? "

" I don't know, just an impulse. I got tired dodging the floorwalker in the department store I worked for. He had big plans for the girls—all horizontal," she said. " At least this was something I could do sitting down."

" Who are you when you aren't Madame Zorita? "

" Lisa Perez. You? "

He told her.

" Nice name," she said. " Nice guy. Pick up your buck, Dominic, and you'll still be a nice guy."

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"I got an idea," he said. "Why don't we put it to work? Like maybe invest it in a bottle of wine?"

She laughed, considering it. "Well, since you're my only customer today, I guess I better humour you."

"Wonderful. I humour so easily."

At the wall phone he said, "Hullo, Herman? This is Lucky. Listen, send over a bottle of sparkling burgundy. Oh, and better throw in a barbecued chicken, too. What's the address here, Lisa?" He repeated it into the phone. "And I guess maybe a few garlic sausages—enough like they were a belt to fit around a fat man. You, for instance." He turned. "You like kosher pickles, Lisa?"

"Try me," she said.

"Got that? Anything else you can think of, Lisa?"

"Well, if you're going to spend the whole dollar," she said, "how about a bale of hay for Howard?"

It turned out that the double doors off the parlour opened on to the bedroom. They pulled a laundry hamper over beside the bed, and it made a table of sorts. They didn't wait for the wine to chill, but had it on the rocks instead, and by the time it was less than shoulder-high the barbecued chicken was a skeleton. By the time the bottle was a dead soldier the garlic sausages were gone. The radiator was hissing cheerfully and there was a full soft rain.

Lisa was in a drowsy sprawl at the foot of the bed; Dominic had a pillow propped behind him. There were nice sounds on the radio, some old Armstrong records from a disc jockey with nostalgia, and if Dominic had ever felt better, it was too much trouble to remember when.

He rolled over beside Lisa, took her face between his palms, studied it for a moment and then kissed it. She didn't quite respond, holding back a little.

"All right, I won't be greedy," he said. "I'll settle for just an ordinary perfect evening."

She shook her head. "No, it isn't anything I didn't expect. Or maybe even want."

He leaned down again, but she sat up. "Listen," she said quickly, "I don't think I'm going to make it with this gipsy thing, do you? I'm not really very good at it, am I?"

"No," Dominic said.

"But I'll be damned if I'll go back to the department store. The hours aren't worth it and—well, I guess I'm just plain lazy," she said defiantly. "I think I must be a whore at heart. Or at

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least I could be. If I could pick my customers," she said, not looking at him.

"I'm listening," he said.

Lisa turned to face him directly. "I have to start thinking about next month's rent," she said. "Could you help me out?"

"How much help did you have in mind?" Dominic said.

"I don't know," she said awkwardly. "I feel so stupid about it. Twenty dollars would mean an awful lot to me. Are you hurt?"

"No," he lied. "We're adults. And I can't think of a nicer way to squander twenty dollars."

"You don't really mind?"

"No," he said. "Look, in spite of what Howard said about my gambling—would you like to go for double or nothing?"

She laughed nervously. "Sure. How?"

"I got a twenty in my billfold," Dominic said. "You decide if you want the serial number to end in odd or even. If you're wrong, I keep it. If you're right, you get another one just like it."

"All right," Lisa smiled. "I'll go for the big evening. Odd."

He took a twenty from his wallet. "L78457627," he repeated slowly, then shook his head and tossed it over to her. He took out another twenty, started to hand it to her then read it aloud. "D26219368. Why couldn't I have picked this one?"

Lisa laughed happily in relief and took both bills. "I guess I should stuff these in my stocking. Isn't that the way they do it in the movies?" She hesitated. "Look, you were such a good loser—can you really afford it?"

Dominic shrugged. "Once in a while, I guess. I work for the city."

"Civil service?"

He nodded.

"I had friends in civil service. It doesn't pay that well." She struggled with herself a moment, then put the bills in his hand and patted it. "My rent's not due for two weeks yet," she said, "I'll think of something. Let's pretend you won."

"Thanks very much, baby," Dominic said. "But I think we're both winners. Those serial numbers wouldn't have been lucky for you."

He roughed her hair with his palm and whistling, removed his coat, enjoying the way her eyes bulged when she saw the Police Special in his shoulder holster.

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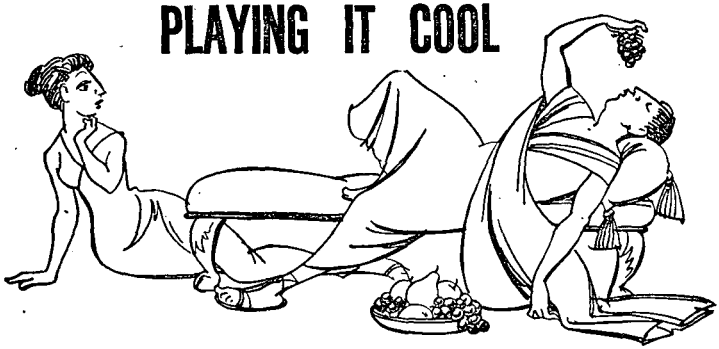
PLAYING IT COOL



I could do without your face and your neck, and your hands, and your limbs, and your bosom, and other of your charms. Indeed, not to fatigue myself with enumerating each of them, I could do without you, Chloe, altogether.

MARTIAL, *Epigrams*

Cutting Him Dead

Werther had a love for Charlotte
Such as words could never utter;
Would you know how first he met her?
She was cutting bread and butter.

Charlotte was a married lady,
And a moral man was Werther,
And for all the wealth of Indies,
Would do nothing for to hurt her.

So he sighed and pined and ogled,
And his passion boiled and bubbled,
Till he blew his silly brains out,
And no more was by it troubled.

Charlotte, having seen his body
Borne before her on a shutter,
Like a well-conducted person,
Went on cutting bread and butter.

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY, *The Sorrows of Werther*

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The Cold Shoulder

"Do you ever read Tennyson?" inquired Edmund conversationally.

"Not very often."

"You should. Tennyson is shortly going to make a come-back in a big way . . . And speaking of Tennyson, have you read *Maud*?"

"Once, long ago."

"It's got some points about it." He quoted softly, "'Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null—' That's you, Phillipa."

"Hardly a compliment."

"It wasn't meant to be. I gather Maud got under the poor fellow's skin just like you've got under mine."

"Oh, don't be absurd, Edmund."

"Oh hell, Phillipa, why are you like you are? What goes on behind your splendidly regular features? What do you think? What do you *feel*? Are you happy, or miserable, or frightened, or what? There must be *something*."

AGATHA CHRISTIE, *A Murder is Announced*

Some Wench!

Weep not for little Léonie
Abducted by a French Marquis!
Though loss of honour was a wrench,
Just think how it's improved her French!

HARRY GRAHAM, *Compensation*

Home and Bored

Polly did not attempt to alter anything. She just flopped into Lady Patricia's bed, in Lady Patricia's bedroom, whose windows looked on to Lady Patricia's grave . . . I think she cared very little about houses. Whatever it was that Polly did care for, and time had yet to disclose the mystery, it was certainly not her home . . . Nor, alas, was it any longer Boy. Complete disillusionment had set in as far as he was concerned, and she was behaving towards him with exactly the same off-hand coolness that had formerly characterised her attitude towards her mother . . .

She did not give me the impression that she was very much interested in the idea of having a baby, although she once said to me, "Doesn't it seem funny to have talcum powder and things, and boring old Sister waiting about, all for somebody who doesn't exist?"

NANCY MITFORD, *Love in a Cold Climate*

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Casual-ties !

Be casual! He'll like that in you. No girl loses anything by holding back a bit at any stage of a friendship with a man!

. . . Oh, the heartbreaks and the wounded pride so many dear girls would save themselves if they did this, to say nothing of the good form and correctness, even in these modern days!

LADY TROUBRIDGE, *Etiquette and Entertaining*

King David and King Solomon
Led merry, merry lives,
With many, many lady friends
And many, many wives;
But when old age crept over them,
With many, many qualms,
King Solomon wrote the Proverbs
And King David wrote the Psalms.

JAMES BALL NAYLOR, *David and Solomon*

In Her Stride . . .

Miss Molly Anderson got all ready to get married and she let me see all of her lovely clothes all spread out on the bed in the spare room. Only she didn't get married. The bridegroom forgot to come back. He travelled. And I guess he took the wrong train or something. Mrs. Anderson shut the shutters, and nobody would come to the door, and when I went around to the kitchen door to take Miss Molly some cinnamon drops, the cook says to me, she said, "Go away, scat." But Miss Molly didn't care if he did forget to come. She bought her a new bath suit with a big sailor collar, and ruffles around her knees, and she married Dr. Thomwood, and I like him. He is handsome. That old absent-minded bridegroom was always saying to me, "Little girl, isn't it time you were going home?" And I had only just got, I mean gotten there.

VIRGINIA CARY HUDSON, *O Ye Jigs and Juleps*

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We aim to cross that bridge—and keep goin'

WHISPER

BY DON STANFORD

A CICADA sang suddenly in the dusty roadside grass, and as suddenly fell silent; the sun was bright hot on the wagon seat, and a stirring of early summer air brought the rank smell of his sweating oxen to Mordecai Murphy's nostrils. He rasped a huge and horny hand over the black whiskery cliff of his chin, and shifted his gaze from the gleaming new plank bridge ahead to the two figures barring his way.

The star pinned to the boy's clean blue shirt had been snipped from the bright tin of a baking-powder can; the letters of the word MARSHAL punched into it with the point of a nail. But the .44 Colt on the boy's hip was real enough, and the bright-haired girl stood back and away as though to let him use it, and there was that in his cool-eyed tanned young face that declared simply and without bravado he might . . .

" Son," Mordecai rumbled deep in his chest, and climbed down from the lead wagon seat with the bullwhip coiled ready in his hand, " I got eighteen wagonloads o' freight here, bound for Californy gold camps, that've promised me a hundred dollars a day for every day I'm under schedule out o' Dodge. I'm eight hundred dollars ahead right now, son, an' I aim to cross that there bridge and keep goin'—an' you're blockin my way! "

He measured the distance between the gun and the boy's hand with a practised eye; at this range Mordecai could hit the boy's wrist with the lash faster than most men could draw. He brought the bullwhip up a little.

The boy shifted his feet slightly in the dust and said flatly, " Mister, I already done told you: this here bridge just got finished a-buildin' today, an' it ain't gonna open until tomorrow. There's folks all over the Territory been workin' on this here bridge, since the old one went out in April flood; we aim to have

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us a dance on it tonight while them planks are new an' smooth, before they get all splintery. An' you nor nobody else is goin' t'drag no wagons across it before sunup tomorrow, Mister!" The boy's cool grey eyes met Mordecai's and locked there.

In the searing instant before the lethal race of hand and whiplash, the girl's voice rose clear and sweet and incongruously polite: " You and your men are most cordially invited to come and dance with us, Mr. Freighter, if you would care to camp the night . . ."

She whispered something fierce and inaudible into her brother's ear—no doubt about the relationship, they were alike as two peas for all the blinding violet in her eyes and the music in her voice. And it came to Mordecai that she would save her brother from Mordecai Murphy—and Mordecai Murphy for herself.

He dropped the bullwhip in the dust; he bowed a sweeping bow. He rumbled, with a politeness equal to her own, " Ma'am, I would surely admire to dance with you. I'll camp."

Six days later, and six hundred bonus dollars out of pocket, Mordecai Murphy rolled across the bridge with his other seventeen wagons strung out behind him and his bright-haired bride beside him on the lead wagon seat. He had predicated his headlong courtship on the confident knowledge that she had fallen in love with him at that first sight; over-riding her blushing protests, he had swept her off her dainty feet.

Now, Mordecai put a bear-like arm around his Julia and drew her close, and as she snuggled contentedly against him he rumbled philosophically, " Now, a man could say, me darlin', that you fallin' in love with me when you did plumb saved my life, for if I'd known your brother was Clyde Barrow I'd not have tempted him to draw against my whip. He'd have kilt me certain sure, me darlin', had you not spoken when you did. An' tell me, now, what was it you whispered to your brother then? "

She gasped, and suddenly dug her face into his chest, shaking her head in violent refusal to answer. And Mordecai Murphy saw the crimson colour flooding her throat and chuckled, and delicately forbore to embarrass her by pressing the question.

About a year later, though, when a letter came from Clyde—now famous throughout the West for his speed and deadliness with the sixgun—on the birth of their first child, Mordecai was reminded of that day on the bridge, and again he asked Julia what it was she had whispered to her brother. And this time she stared at him wide-eyed and white in the face, and slowly the

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tears filled her eyes and spilt over and she was racked with weeping. But she would not answer.

So another year passed, and with it came another child, and then another letter from Clyde, saying that he would stop the night with them on his way to a new marshal's job in Montana. And as they talked together, anticipating Clyde's visit and reminiscing of old times, Mordecai was suddenly reminded that she had never answered that one question. So he asked it again, and at once Julia giggled and began to laugh helplessly. She was still sputtering with laughter when they went to bed that night, while Mordecai sulked at her refusal either to answer him or to share her mirth with him.

He nursed his sulky hurt, and when Clyde arrived, Mordecai could hardly wait until supper was finished and he had an opportunity to lean back in his chair and rumble, " Now, then, Brother-in-law, if you'll think back to the first time we met, when you were half an inch from killin' the man your sister loved, there's a thing I'd be pleased if you'd tell me: what was it she whispered in your ear, when she was pleadin' with you to spare me? "

Julia bounced up and slapped him hard across the face and fled into the kitchen, slamming the door, and after a startled moment Mordecai began to shake with laughter.

" Now, I hope you'll remember," he said to Clyde, " for it's a puzzle to me what a woman might say to her brother about the man she loved that would make her blush one year an' weep the next, an' laugh at her man the third an' fight like a cat thereafter! "

Clyde Barrow's face was expressionless as always, yet there was an amused light in his cool grey eyes as he answered, drawling, " Why, certain sure I recall it, Mordecai. She said, ' Now we been polite, Clyde, like Ma would've wanted we ought. *Now* if the big hairy baboon ain't polite right back—why, you go right ahead an' kill him, Clyde! ' "

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SOLUTION TO TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD (PAGE 167)

ACROSS. 1, Battersea. 7, Grog. 8, Okapi. 9, Telegram. 12, Reams. 14, Founder. 15, Patch up. 16, Agree. 17, Yorkists. 20, Canto. 22, Halo. 23, Bagatelle.

DOWN. 1, Biography. 2, Tea. 3, Exits. 4, Scallop. 5, Agog. 6, Soya. 10, Rider. 11, Morse code. 13, Altar. 14, Fussing. 16, Ascot. 18, Oral. 19, Knob. 21, Nil.

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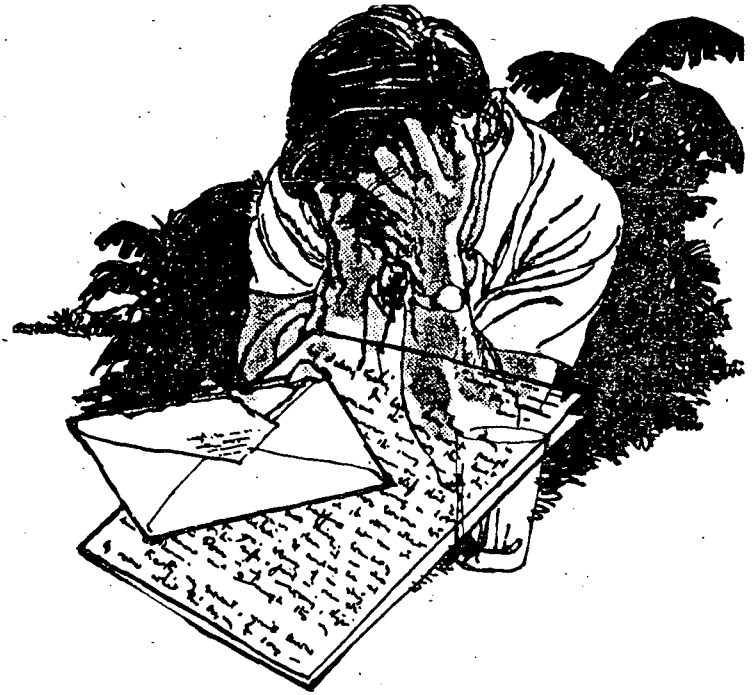

Letter from a Stranger

WITH a single glance—or so it seemed—she saw that the bus had arrived and was reversing outside the public house, that the postman was just about to enter the gateway of number ten and that he was the one with the moustache, that rare creature, a surly postman. On another occasion, in circumstances almost exactly like these he had told her that it was against the rules for him to hand over letters in the street. So now she waited, her heart beginning to thud, her mind to babble . . .

Oh, please let there not be letters for the houses in between. I might just do it then. I simply can't wait till this evening to see

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whether Rob's written. And at the same time I don't want to be late. If it'd been the nice postman he'd have given it to me as I ran by him. It would have to be old Walrus this morning!

Now he was turning in at . . . no he wasn't; nothing for number eleven. Twelve? No, I still might do it. Is that the edge of an airmail envelope? Ah, nothing for number thirteen either, and that's the end of the row with the gardens in front; even if he stops at fourteen, but he isn't. Here, here, that's my letter; at last, my letter.

She snatched it, gasped, " Thank you," and began to run.

She sank down into the nearest seat in the bus and just for a second or two sat, holding the letter and making no move to open it. The rush and the tension of waiting and the pleasure of finally receiving what she had waited for had made her heart beat so hard that she couldn't see properly, everything seemed to be jigging about. But within a minute it had all settled down and there on her lap was the long, red and blue bordered envelope with her name and address neatly typed: *Miss Kathy Lawson, 15 The Street, Tadwell Ash.* Deliberately she restrained herself from thrusting her finger under the flap and ripping it open. She took from her handbag a file and slit the envelope neatly.

The letter was in Rob's writing, or rather in the nervous, lurching scrawl which Rob's writing became when he wrote under pressure of time, or any kind of emotional stress; but the letter itself seemed to be that of a stranger.

It was not that she had expected any fulsome expressions of love or even affection. It was only in novels, or on the films, that men said, " I love you, I love you." In real life, love was a much shyer creature, peeping out in sentences like, " Mind you don't work too hard," and of course, it also showed itself in the forward-looking sentences. Kathy, knew Rob's style very well.

The stranger had written:

> My Darling Kathy,
>
> I've been thinking things over, that is why I didn't write sooner, putting off what is hard to say, the way people do. Still, it must be said, and it's this. I think it would be unwise, to say the least, for you to come out here at Easter, as planned. For one thing it's the wrong time of year, summer and the worst of the heat just coming on, and though I remember you said you liked hot weather, I remind myself that you have no idea, you think 80° is hot and you never get more than three days running as

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hot as that. But there are other, perhaps more serious reasons, too. All this talk about Jamaica leaving the Federation. If it does, what happens to St. Agnes? Nobody seems to know, but the one sure thing is, it'll be bad. Bad for people like me, I mean. Everybody agrees that if we go out when Jamaica does the English born and bred will be cut down to size pretty sharply; whereas if we stay in the Federation we shall, like the rest of the small islands, suffer a fall in our standard of living. Either way it wouldn't be right for you and in fact I'm not certain that I should stay here. The sugar business in Peru is up and coming, they're short of technicians and I might try my luck there.

Kathy, my sweet, you'll know by now what I'm trying to say. I'm calling it off. Believe me, you're losing nothing; you can find ten better men than I am in the length of a street. It isn't (at this point the writing deteriorated so much as to be almost illegible) another woman, or anything like that. For me there'll never be anybody but you. I'd like you to keep the ring, even if you wear it on another finger, but not to remember me by. Forget me as soon as you can, and be happy.

She felt nothing, except a stunned incredulity. It was too ludicrous to take seriously. She remembered the afternoon they had got engaged. They'd been picnicking in a daisy meadow and suddenly he'd taken her in his arms and said, " I shan't be happy until you're in St. Agnes with me . . . "

She turned back to the beginning of the letter and slowly read each word again. Up to a point it made sense; it hadn't been written by a man who was drunk, or delirious with fever. And if it didn't sound as though Rob had written it—well, after all, she had no experience of how Rob would write if he wished to break off an engagement of three years' standing. Perhaps he would write like this. Perhaps he had.

The bus stopped at one of its usual halting places, but Kathy didn't notice until a voice said half truculently, " Excuse *me*," and looking up she saw a woman waiting impatiently for Kathy to take the seat by the window, and allow her to sit down.

She said mechanically, " I'm sorry," and edged along the seat. As she moved, the envelope slid from her lap and when she retrieved it the underside was uppermost. As always Rob had written his name above the printed address of Head Office:

R. Childerhouse, c/o B.W.I.S. Co.,
Nelson Quay, Freeport, St. Agnes, B.W.I.

In a few days' time she should have been Mrs. Childerhouse . . .

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Somewhere there was an object—and she would have had to be blind, deaf and plain idiotic not to know that it was a dressing-case—which was going to be stamped K.C. Her farewell present from her pupils and fellow teachers. Imagine having to say that after all she wasn't leaving, didn't need a dressing-case wasn't going to be married, could never own anything marked K.C. Imagine the horror!

She folded this stranger's letter and opening her bag took out two others exactly like it. Rob's last two letters. Had there been, in either, any hint of what was to come? She read them through carefully, feeling naked, exposed, ready to be hurt. There was nothing . . . except . . . unless. Yes, it was true.

In the earlier of the two previous letters there were some references to the future, a mention of how little of their waiting time was left to be lived through; the other letter contained no such reference. But that was all understood. In earlier letters, Rob had told her everything he could think of that would be useful for her to know—even to the fact that cotton underwear was to be preferred to silk or nylon.

The bus stopped outside the school gates. Walking up between the flowering shrubs that edged the drive, she made a great effort to compose herself, to push this whole thing away to the back of her mind, there to stay until dinner-time at least. There were only four days more to the end of term and she must leave everything ship-shape for her successor . . .

The worst moment in a day full of bad ones came when she faced a class of younger girls to whom she taught Geography. When they had settled down she said, "Take your *Children of Other Lands* and your exercise books." The class let out a muffled groan and one little girl, bolder than the rest said, "But Miss, you said last time that you'd tell us about the place where you're going to live."

She had a brief sharp struggle with herself; then she said, "Yes, of course. Then you'll need your atlases . . ."

St. Agnes, a little island to the south-west of Jamaica, too small to be named on the school-atlas map of the Caribbean; just a dot. (The place that had been the home of her heart for three years! This was no time to think of that.) She bent her mind sternly to the task of giving the class some notion of its size in terms which they understood, naming villages from which they had come in to school that morning. Yes, for all that it was only a dot on the map you could put all these places down on the island and still have room for more. And it wasn't flat, like the land around here; just north of its centre it sloped up to a mountain

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called the Fire Mountain, an extinct volcano. They talked for a while about volcanoes and one child said, with East Anglian heartiness, " Let's hope it don't come alive, Miss, while *you're* there."

Hurriedly she went on to talk about what grew in the rich volcanic soil. Sugar. Not as it was understood in East Anglia, sugar beet like swollen parsnips, but sugar cane with thick stems, rather like bamboo, with dark green leaves. As she described the process of cutting and crushing the canes, she saw Rob walking about against the pictured background, and again hastily moved on to talk about the people who did the actual work. Black, most of them, brought from Africa as slaves; free now and paid for their work; paid very little in comparison with English wages, and rather poor, but of course they didn't need so many clothes, or so much heating. On the whole they were happy people . . .

And so on and so on. The lesson was rather like the Little Mermaid's walk on the knives, for most of the things which she was now telling the children had been told her by Rob. Kathy was almost grateful to be interrupted by a plump, cherub-faced little girl who raised a hand.

" Yes, Lorna? "

" Miss, they do black magic there."

" They're *said* to do so," Kathy said judicially. " But I think that kind of thing is finished now." She was all ready to explain that the slaves had taken some strange old customs and rituals with them from Africa and that maybe the outward form had remained, like our own Guy Fawkes celebration. But Lorna, under the cherubic look, had a strong will.

" Miss, it was in a film, and it was nowadays; wasn't it, Shirley?" She appealed to another child. " I mean they'd got cars. The one who did the voovoo, he had a car."

" Voodoo," Shirley said.

" Well, if ever I see anyone doing black magic in a car," Kathy said, forcing herself to speak cheerfully, " I'll try to get a picture to send with the rest." She had already promised to send photographs and postcards of anything interesting.

And finally the day ended and she was back in her neat—almost old-maidishly neat—bedsitting-room, alone at last and face to face with her problem.

To begin with she opened a drawer and took out a thick bundle of Rob's letters. There were the early ones in which now and again a slight and not unwelcome impatience betrayed itself—" I know we reckoned that it might be three years, but

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I hope to heavens it won't be . . . " " Every Sunday I say to myself, Well, there's another week gone. I know how prisoners feel serving a three-year sentence."

They had known that it would be about three years or so because at the time of their engagement the semi-crippled aunt with whom Kathy lived was only fifty-seven years of age and the very pleasant home for elderly people where she wished to end her days didn't take anyone under the age of sixty unless they were hopelessly infirm. Aunt Kate wasn't that, yet, but she was far from fit to be left alone, and Kathy, to whom she had been a mother, wasn't prepared to leave her.

Rob had agreed, he'd grumbled a little, but agreed; three years wasn't long. He'd intended to go back and build a new bungalow. They'd had great fun planning that bungalow and deciding where it should be. The sugar mill itself stood inland, in the centre of the best sugar-growing region and the Company's bungalows were in the same area. The custom of housing employees on the spot had dated from the pre-automobile, pre-telephone days, when roads were practically non-existent.

" We," Rob said, " could live at Point Clear, where even on the hottest day there's a breeze, and where there's a colony of people who aren't in sugar. You'd prefer that, I'm sure."

Many of the letters contained reports about the progress of the bungalow; he'd shown an amount of imagination rather unusual in a man in the things he told her, things only a woman would have been expected to regard as important. He'd sent sketches, hastily-drawn plans, and finally photographs. There was a letter which said:

> Well, I've moved in. Need I say how much I wish that you'd moved in too and been carried over the threshold. Still, that is all to come, isn't it, darling? I've found myself a housekeeper, an incredible old woman who is a walking history of the island; in a sense. Spanish, French, negro and heaven knows what other bloods contend for mastery in her veins. She weighs sixteen stone, has six children all named after saints, is a Methodist, cooks like an angel and is indescribably filthy—but don't let that worry you. I'm immune to germs and she is strictly pro tem, I made that quite clear when I engaged her.

Letter after letter of that period rippled on; and then there was one, posted late in October, in reply to the one which she had sent him to tell him there would be a room free for Aunt Kate in the home just before Christmas; that she would give, at

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Christmas, a term's notice, as she was bound to do, and that they could be married soon after Easter. *Why, why, why*, he wrote, *didn't you give in your notice earlier and teach on a day to day basis so that the moment Aunt K. was home and dry you could have come here? What a wicked waste of time. Still, we won't dwell on that . . .*

The letter went on to give her directions about everything she must do or should know. It was that letter which ended, *Unlike you I've been very forehanded and have told Rosa that her employment with me ends at Easter. Maybe that wasn't very clever, the cooking hasn't been so good since but I thought it best to give her time to get accustomed to the idea and find herself another job.*

October. And now, reading the letters again she realised that a subtle, almost imperceptible change had set in, unnoticed by her. The later letters lacked gaiety, that was it. Still fond, still forward-looking, but no longer effervescent. As though, in October, Rob had aged. Now why? Because if she could answer that she might know why he had written the letter which had reached her that morning.

Before she slept she had an answer, of a kind. She was inclined to be a bookish girl, and the answer had arrived in her mind by way of a remembered story in a book. A story, an excellent and very perceptive story, about a young man who, on the eve of his wedding called on his prospective bride and told her that he couldn't marry her. A plain, straightforward case of pre-marital nerves. In the story they had been married after all, but hadn't been happy because the girl had never been able to live down her feeling of having been rejected. That wouldn't happen to Kathy, because Kathy understood.

In every letter that Rob had written since the wedding date had been more or less fixed she could read, now that her eyes were opened, evidence of his . . . not reluctance, you couldn't call it that, but his realisation of what a serious step marriage was. The realisation had grown and grown until at last he had panicked and written to call the whole thing off. She didn't hold that against him. After all, three years, or almost three years, had elapsed since they had seen one another, and the degree of visual memory of which people were capable varied. Most likely when it really came to the point, Rob had felt that he had engaged himself to a stranger . . .

For the moment she was satisfied. Later she admitted that she had accepted this self-offered explanation because she wanted to, because the alternative was so appalling. Imagine having to tell everybody that the engagement was broken off—facing their

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curiosity, or their pity. Imagine the rest of life, forty, fifty years perhaps, not married to Rob . . .

She spent an almost sleepless night, milling things over and over and always coming back to the certainty that she was right in her speculation as to Rob's reason for writing as he had done. Next day, in the lunch hour, she went to the post office and despatched an extravagant telegram:

Letter received. Ignore heat and politics. Arriving as planned. Much love.

Had his letter been anything more than the product of a mood he would cable back, telling her not to come. She spent three nerve-racking days, but nothing happened. The end of term came and on Maundy Thursday, just as she had originally planned, she went to London Airport, following in detail all the directions which Rob had given her when he wrote in October. Now and again as she packed and made her final arrangements she told herself firmly that she was doing the one sensible thing and that if, if, if—come on, let's face it—when she reached St. Agnes she found that Rob really didn't wish to marry her, there'd be no great harm done. She'd merely have had a very expensive, but doubtless interesting Easter holiday . . . Except that I shall go mad, because I still love him, and if he's stopped loving me for any reason there'll be nothing left in life for me. And that is a nonsensical way to think, because people don't die when they want to, or because their plans go wrong. If he has stopped loving me I shall go back with some firsthand knowledge of West Indian geography. Ha, ha. And that again is no way to think; hysteria never yet served any purpose . . .

AFTER thirty-six hours of air travel one neither looks nor feels one's best. As the plane landed at the rather engagingly miniature and amateur-seeming Freeport terminal Kathy found herself dwelling upon one aspect of the situation which she felt she had been a fool to ignore for so long. Rob had said that there was nobody else; but suppose he had said that out of kindness of heart, an effort to save her face? Suppose by her headstrong action she had made it necessary for him to say in words what he had shied away from writing? Well, she would soon know, for whether he were still in love with her or not, his sense of duty would have brought him to meet her and the moment she saw him she would know.

He was not waiting. Only two other passengers had ended

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their journey at Freeport, and only five or six people were waiting beyond the barrier. Outside, in the open space from which heat flowed as though from the open door of an oven, there were half a dozen cars and three once-elaborate, now extremely shabby, canopied carriages that surely dated back to Victoria's day—drawn by horses almost as old.

"You wishing cab, ma'am?" her porter asked.

"Just a minute," she said in a lost way, and again raked the parked cars with her eyes. She knew Rob's car. He'd sent her photographs too. The car was not there.

So she nodded.

"Old style, maybe? Coolest way, best way to see scenery. Very pretty road to Freeport." He was steering her towards one of the decrepit carriages with whose driver he doubtless had some link, familiar or financial.

"No. A taxi, please. I'm in a hurry."

The porter sighed resignedly and led her towards a large, battered Buick.

"I want to go to Point Clear, please."

"Point Clear, ma'am. Right away." The driver was pleased; a fifteen shilling job. The fare into Freeport was only three and sixpence.

At any other time she would have been appalled by his method of driving, especially the way in which he cut corners, but now she was entranced by the changing view. The road ran gently uphill between, on one hand, what looked like a solid wall of massed blossoms, and on the other a green sea of waving treetops which occasionally broke and admitted a vista of the real sea, hyacinth blue, curdling cream against a white beach. Having climbed, the road ran downhill again, the land flattened out, there was no view of the sea, merely on either hand great stretches of cane field, murmuring.

Here and there by the roadside groups of ugly little houses, chickens and pigs and near-naked children all mixed together in the dust, some lean leggy dogs of no known breed who barked savagely at the passing car, and once the breeze brought a strange, not quite pleasant not quite unpleasant scent, as though somebody were making toffee over a very smoky fire. That must be the sugar mill; she remembered with painful clarity Rob saying, "It's a self-supporting trade, we use the dried crushed cane for fuel."

Shortly after that they left the road and turned left along a track, and the sea came into view again, now only about twenty feet below the level of the road. And then, quite suddenly, a

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group of pleasant, low, sprawling houses with wide verandas, set in gardens all abrim with flowers.

The driver slowed a little and turning his head clean round, with a fine disregard for safety, asked, " What house you want, ma'am? "

" It's called Ashwell," she said. (" I'd like it to have a name that sounds homelike to you, but I really don't care for Tad," Rob had written, " so what would you say to Ashwell? ") " If you go slowly I think I shall recognise it. Yes, that's it, there on the left . . . "

There was no boundary fence, no gateway; a row of bushes, some flowering pink and some white, separated a stretch of lawn from the road; the short drive was bordered on one side by a very English-looking rosebed. Three wide steps led up to a veranda of which the supporting pillars were shrouded with climbing roses and other flowers and on the inner side of the veranda a series of glass doors leading into the house. On this hot morning they were all closed.

For a moment she forgot the patient dark-skinned man hauling her luggage, and the ticking of the engine. This was her house, the house that had been specially built for her. Cupping her hands about her eyes she tried to peer in through the glass doors. Inside, because of the veranda, the rooms were dark and she could see little except dark shapes floating in the shadow; but one room had a window at the opposite end—sitting-room; chairs and a sofa of cane and wood with cool-looking upholstery, pale green patterned with white flowers, white, rough-looking walls, shining honey-coloured floor; a beautiful room. And near the window through which she was peering, so near in fact that at first her questing eyes had missed it, a small grand piano, and standing upon it, in a silver frame so tarnished as to look black, her own photograph. Taken just after she became engaged; not smiling, but happy-looking, enchanted almost. It stared back at her. What am I doing here? What are *you* doing here?

Behind her, confusion, running footsteps, an American voice saying, " Constance! My dear! At last! " She turned and faced a slim, long-legged young woman wearing a Chinese-looking cotton short coat over a swimsuit and flapping sandals. She held a key. Her eager, friendly look changed to one of astonishment. " Oh, excuse *me*. I thought you were Con . . . Mrs. Burbage, a friend of mine. Only she was to arrive tomorrow."

" At *this* house? "

" That's right. Oh, I see. You're her house guest, she did mention . . . Well, what difference does a day make? Here's the

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key, dump your stuff and come across and have some coffee. Any friend of Constance is a friend of mine as they say. I'm Dollie Lever."

"My name is Kathy Lawson and I'm afraid I'm not a friend—I mean I don't know Mrs. Burbage. I'm really looking for Mr. Childerhouse."

Dollie Lever said, "Oh—" and seldom had a monosyllable been more eloquent. "I know the name naturally. He's the one who rented the place to Constance."

"Did you know him?"

"Not to say *know*." Her eyes flickered.

"You couldn't tell me where I could find him?"

"No. No, I couldn't. Actually we haven't been here long; and he wasn't one you could . . . I mean, we didn't have time to get neighbourly. There was the house, bang next door and there was my friend Constance—she lost her husband last year and we thought a change of scene, and being close to us without being *in* the house, you know . . . So we put her in touch and she should move in tomorrow. From the back you look a bit like her and seeing the cab . . . The offer of coffee still stands," she said.

Obviously a kind, friendly person, a potential good neighbour; and she had lived, for however short a time, alongside Rob and found that "he wasn't one you could—" If she'd finished the sentence it would have run—"be neighbourly with." But why? There wasn't a man alive more likely to be a good neighbour than Rob. Shy herself, the complete introvert, she had often admired, envied and commented upon his ability to come to terms with almost anyone. With every passing minute, with every passing thought, the mystery deepened.

She said, "It's very kind of you to ask me, but I'm afraid I can't spare the time. I must find Mr. Childerhouse. Do you think anyone around—" she looked up and down the deceptively suburban-looking road—"would be able to help?"

Mrs. Lever swung the key round and round on her forefinger. "I wouldn't know. I shouldn't think so. You see, he just *went*. There's this, though . . . he was in sugar, wasn't he? If you really want to find him, they could tell you, down at the office."

"Yes, I had thought of that. I'll go there now. There is just one thing, Mrs. Lever. You have a key, and I don't for a moment suppose that Mrs. Burbage, any more than any other tenant, would wish to live with photographs of the house-owner's . . . family. Do you think I might remove that photograph from the piano?"

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" If I know Constance, and I do, she'll have upwards of thirty of her own."

Where the road back into Freeport made a hairpin bend that seemed to carry it almost over the top of the massed forest of trees Kathy threw the photograph out. The act was like a scream, a blow, a violent gesture; it purged her; and when, a little later she was admitted to the inmost office of the B.W.I.S.C. on Nelson Quay, she was calm, coherent and almost invulnerable.

Mr. Chambers said, " I was more grieved than I can tell you. I've been out here for thirty years and I've seen several men go to pieces for a variety of reasons, anything from women to fighting cocks. But they were weaklings to start with—it's all very well, this constant cry about all men being equal, anybody who has to do with more than two men knows jolly well that they aren't. But I did look on Rob Childerhouse as one of the elect, absolutely sound, a first-class engineer and—it's a rare combination—a good administrative man. I'd have named him as my successor, if I'd been asked." He shifted in his chair. " I know they claim nowadays to cure alcoholics and I did . . . that'd be early in December if I remember rightly, offer him leave to go to New York and try. But . . . did you ever see him intoxicated, Miss Lawson? "

She sat there, hollow and frail as a blown eggshell; there was no substance to her at all. Only, somewhere inside the hollow head some little crumb of mind was still at work. " I never did," she said. " Rob was always . . . no, abstemious isn't the word I want, *sensible*. At a party he'd say, ' Not for me, I'm driving.' And he wasn't the kind of . . . well, repressed drinker. The sort that do sometimes shock everybody by breaking out. I just don't understand this at all. You say he began in October? "

" That is so. He was living, as you know, at Point Clear—the mill is some ten miles away. There was a breakdown, something the manager was unable to deal with, and he telephoned Childerhouse, who, after a long delay did come to the telephone and talked quite incoherently. At five o'clock on the following afternoon he put in an appearance and remedied what was wrong and though the matter was reported, it was, after all, a single lapse in a record of conscientious service. But that was only a beginning . . . " Mr. Chambers waved a dismissing hand.

" I can't go into details, many of them are very unpleasant and quite unsuitable for discussion. His deterioration was extremely rapid; mistake upon mistake, grave dereliction of duty. In the end it was simply a question of what to do with him. He had,

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after all, served the Company faithfully for twelve years and in a multi-racial community such as this there *are* considerations which can't with safety, be entirely discounted. So we found h m a sinecure." Mr. Chambers' rather prominent brown eyes took on a peculiar look. " About twenty years ago there was some slight disturbance here; the British and West Indian Sugar Company was accused of monopoly, of exploiting the natives . . . you know the kind of stuff that is talked nowadays. So we started an experiment—I don't think I should be guilty of undue vanity if I claimed that it was my own idea.

" Over to the North West, towards the place called Cork's Harbour—Cork was a famous buccaneer in his day—there is a valley eminently suited to the growing of sugar cane. We set up a subsidiary factory there and all the malcontents were offered three, five, ten acres, whatever they thought they could manage, upon which to grow their own cane, cut it, haul it into the factory, have it processed, and share whatever profit there might be. An experiment, you might almost say, in communism. I need hardly tell you that it was not a success, the native St. Agnesian, left to himself, is an idle fellow without much idea of time, and as technicians they're much stronger in theory than in practice. However, we've subsidised the place and kept it going because it is a line of defence; we're not exploiting the native; Cork's harbour is proof positive that we are endeavouring to train him to be, eventually, left on his own. And . . . "

" And Rob is there," Kathy interrupted.

" He is indeed. As I said, a sinecure. He is called technical adviser and any mistake, any lack of judgment of which he is guilty there will pass unnoticed in the general muddle." Abruptly the man became a human being. " Honestly, Miss Lawson, my advice to you, and it's the advice I should give my own daughter in your position . . . "

" I know," she said. " Thank you for being so frank with me."

" I think I should warn you to be prepared for . . . a shock. It's some weeks now since I saw him and even then— " He broke off and looked at his watch. " Miss Lawson, be advised by me. Spend the night in Freeport and I'll telephone early in the morning and tell him that you are about to arrive. In that way there would be a chance of your finding him sensible."

" Thank you. No, I'd rather go now."

" Then I'll arrange a Company car, which will be reasonably sure not to break down and leave you stranded."

The road led back towards Point Clear but this time they did not turn off. The sun, burning crimson, poised itself for a

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moment where sea and sky met and then fell into the sea and was gone. There was the brief tropic twilight and then velvety dark into which the car's headlamps pressed cones of light. The driver, angered at being sent on a long journey so late in the day, drove furiously, harshly grinding the gears and swooping around bends as though his intention were to make his passenger car-sick. Finally a few scattered lights appeared.

"This'm Cork Harbour. Know which house?"

"No. I want Mr. Childerhouse. Perhaps you could ask."

He alighted grudgingly and went towards a house. Kathy heard a woman's voice, velvety as the night and musical say, "Man, you won't never get no car nearer than you am this minute." The rest of what was said she did not hear. The driver came back and said, "There'm only a path down. Path start over there," he vaguely indicated the direction opposite the house at which he had asked the way.

She got out of the car slowly like an old woman, and straightening herself felt in her purse. She had one half-crown ready, that was to be his tip, and if he had to carry two bags any distance at all, he must have more. But before she could close her bag again he had thrown—really there was no other word—thrown her bags out of the car, had jumped back into his seat and was reversing . . . Was gone.

She stood alone, in the dark, in an unknown place. It was the kind of thing that only happened to people in nightmares. This was the moment when you screamed, and woke.

She closed her eyes and held them closed while she counted twenty, opened them and was pleased to find that now the darkness was less impenetrable. She could see a gap between two high bushes and to one side of the gap a white-painted post with a mailbox nailed to it. The surly driver, whose night sight was better than her own had dumped her cases close by this post. She flicked her lighter and held its brave little flame to the mailbox and was able to read, *Cork H.*49. *R. Childerhouse.* Well, it had been a hard and bitter struggle, but she had arrived. In a matter of moments she'd actually see Rob, hear him speak . . .

The path sloped sharply down, a mass of large pebbles from which the rain had washed all soil, very difficult to walk upon. There seemed to be two buildings at the end of the path, squat and black in the darkness. One had a lighted window. A dog barked. A door opened, an oblong of light next to the square of the lighted window. A woman's voice cried sharply, "Who's there? That you, John Thomas?"

"I'm Miss Lawson," Kathy said, slithering towards the light.

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For a second there was no sound except the rattle of stones under her feet. Then the woman's voice said, " Miss Lawson. So you done come."

Her voice had changed from a challenge, almost to a soft caress. And now they were face to face. Stout, bulging, motherly figure outlined black against the light of the doorway; comforting, pitying voice! " Missy, you should've took heed. Mr. Childerhouse, din't he write and say not to come? Din't he say so? " There was something so infinitely sad and understanding in that voice; it said, he promised, he didn't keep his promise, that's men, they always let you down. It made you, tired by the journey and the events of this horrible day, want to break down, cry on that comfortable shoulder and tell everything. But that, of course, was unthinkable.

" You're Rosa? " Kathy said, and the question made the remark tilt up at the end in a way that sounded cool, very English, and in face of what the woman had said, somehow rebuking. " Where is Mr. Childerhouse? "

" Across in his home," the woman said, indicating the completely darkened building. " Asleep most like. I was just going over. I cook in here." By this time they were inside Rosa's house where an unshaded electric bulb threw a harsh light upon more clutter and muddle than the eye could take in, and upon three, no, four little round dark faces with great wide black eyes. " Then I go over and wake him and give him his supper."

" I see. Well, I'll go over and wake him myself."

" Maybe I should come and put the light on, eh? "

" That would be kind."

A part of her mind freewheeling about in the background, noted that Rosa was less negroid, far less black than most of the people she had seen that day. Her skin was a buffish grey, like a white person's whose sun-tan was fading, and her hair had no kink. It was dead straight, black going grey and severely dressed.

" Mr. Childerhouse," Rosa said, leading the way, " he's gonna be almighty surprised."

" I hope pleasantly," Kathy said . . . But I sent the telegram. What happened to *that*?

" Mr. Childerhouse he ain't been hisself lately. He tell you that? Ain't none of my business, but I told him and told him, three-four months now. You are very sick man; it ain't right nor just, I tell him, bring Missy out here and you not yourself. And in the end he agree. He say he write . . . "

In the darkness, as familiar with it as with the inside of her

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own pocket, she opened a door, pressed a switch and revealed a kitchen, reasonably well-equipped but utterly desolate; a kitchen which for a long time had not been used for its proper purpose. Beyond the kitchen, a sitting-room, suddenly exposed by the light . . . dirty, untidy, hideous, and beyond that . . .

Kathy said, " Thank you, Rosa, I'd like you to leave us now."

ABSOLUTELY disgusting; completely heartbreaking . . . Pallid, unshaven, grey-lipped mouth open, he lay on a filthy pillow. He was so thin that the closed eyes lay in deep hollows and the cheekbone showed sharp, with another hollow below it.

She said to herself— But this is nonsense. October, April. People who drink themselves to death take years and years over it. And he looks . . . Oh, thank God I came. There's something else, something terribly wrong with him and all that those idiots could think of was that he was drunk. And maybe he knew— that's why he wrote me that letter.

She said softly, " Rob." And then again, rather more loudly and urgently, " Rob." The tempo of his stertorous breathing changed a little; he stirred, gave a groan, and then shrinkingly as though the light hurt, opened his eyes. He looked at her, blinked, looked again; without surprise, with a kind of resigned acceptance.

She said, " Darling." And then, below the surface of that sick, haggard face, something broke.

" Kathy! " he said. She knelt on the filthy floor and put her arms around him, he clasped her and for a moment they clung, rocking, in the embrace, the reuniting embrace to which each had looked forward for three long years.

It was he who broke away. " I'm not fit to touch you, not fit to be touched," he muttered, and then, as though reminded: " Kathy, I wrote. I asked you not to come."

" But I did. And, oh, how glad I am that I did. You're ill and nobody's been looking after you. It'll all be different, now."

For a second it looked as though he were going to accept this, the excuse that she offered, ready-made, but some fundamental honesty prevented him. " No," he said slowly. " I'm not ill. You may as well know, if I don't tell you somebody soon will. I'm a drunk, Kathy. A helpless, hopeless drunk. And you must go straight back home and forget all about me."

" Don't be silly," she said, as though speaking to a child. " Nobody becomes a hopeless alcoholic in six months. You've

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been too much alone, probably worked too hard. And you haven't been looked after properly. That Rosa is a sloven!" The last sentence popped out almost against her will, an irrelevance, and yet not quite irrelevant.

"Oh, no," he said. "You mustn't miscall Rosa. She's been my one friend. That's true. When they chucked me out she uprooted herself and her family and came with me, and according to her lights, she's looked after me well."

Her lights, Kathy thought, are pretty dim ones; but I didn't come here to argue about Rosa. And as though he shared the thought Rob seemed to brace himself, to take on some faint resemblance to the man she knew. "Poor darling," he said, "you must be tired out. Come and sit down and I'll get you a . . . a cup of tea. That's one thing I can do for myself."

Walking a little unsteadily he led the way into the sitting-room, tossed the clutter from a settee, punched a cushion which gave off a cloud of dust, and smoothed the dirty, crumpled cover. "Put your feet up. While the kettle boils I'll see if Rosa can produce something a bit tasty."

I don't think that I could eat anything that came out of *that* kitchen, Kathy thought; but the tea refreshed her—though it hurt to see and hear how Rob's unsteady hands rattled the crockery—and when Rosa had lumbered in, tossed a few things on the table, gone away and then returned with a covered dish, she discovered that hunger was a good antidote to squeamishness.

"This is Thursday, isn't it?" Rob said. "There'll be no plane out till Saturday. You must go back to Freeport tomorrow and stay at the Lord Nelson. It's a tourist place, quite comfortable."

"I'm going to stay here," Kathy said.

"Darling, you can't. If you won't think of yourself, think of me. How could I bear it? You have no idea. You aren't taking this nearly seriously enough. You just happen to have walked in when I'm normal." (Normal, great heavens!) "I rolled into that bed at midday absolutely sozzled, Kathy. Every day the same. I get up, shivering and shaking and feeling like hell and go across to the mill, counting the hours, the minutes even to when I can start drinking again. By midday I'm out. Tonight, but for your coming I should have started again by now. As it is . . ." He broke off, looked at her in utter misery and said, "Let's face it. I want a drink right now. I want it so badly that I can't think about anything else."

"There's no harm in a drink," Kathy said. "As a matter of fact I could use one myself."

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He brightened. "That's my girl." He left the table, went to a gimcrack cupboard and produced a black bottle. "Rum," he said, "the sort we make here, a lot stronger than that we export. You'll need something with it. I'll see if there's any orange juice. She sometimes forgets."

But he came back with a glass jug, straight from the fridge and already misted. He mixed her a drink, a little rum, a good deal of orange juice, poured neat rum for himself. She waited for him to say some word in recognition of the fact that this was their first drink together for three years, but without speaking he lifted the glass and drank, avidly.

Almost immediately he looked better, less drawn, less haggard, less embarrassed. She thought inconsequently of a blue hydrangea which she had once given Aunt Kate and which both of them on one occasion forgot to water. It looked completely dead and without much hope of its survival she had plunged it into a bucket of water. In a matter of minutes it had perked up, just as Rob was perking up now.

"Ah, that's better," he said. "You know, it was naughty of you to take me on the hop like this. The least I could have done was to meet the plane. You should have let me know."

"I sent a telegram saying that I was arriving as arranged."

"Well, I never got it."

"It probably went to Point Clear. I went there this morning." A little tactlessly, in the circumstances, yet innocently enough, she said how much she admired the house; and then he broke down. He put his head in his hands and in an almost sobbing voice, denounced himself for the mess he'd made of everything; he spoke of the disgrace of his demotion, of the misery he had caused her, of his complete and utter hopelessness.

There was nothing to do but to go around the table and put her hands on his shaking shoulders and speak, as to a hurt child, promising that it was all over, that it would all be changed now that she was here . . . she even found herself saying, "There, there, darling, there, there. Everything's going to be all right."

At the end, he said, "There's only one thing you can do now, Kathy, to help me. Go straight back home and never give me another thought."

"I'm staying here, whether you want me or not," she said.

And then the high drama fizzled out into a banal argument as to who should sleep where. Rob went and shouted again for Rosa who waddled in carrying some clean bed linen. Kathy was to sleep in the freshly-made bed and he would have the sitting-room settee.

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It was not until the next morning that she realised what a mistake that had been since it left him alone with the bottle of rum. Three-quarters full in the evening, it was empty and on its side when she tiptoed through to make a cup of tea in the kitchen.

So began a time during which life, even at the moment when it was being lived in most practical fashion, seemed to be the very stuff of fantasy. Rob drunk, Rob sober, Rob drunk again. The poor little bungalow properly cleaned and filled with flowers. Rosa sulky, Rosa pathetic, and finally Rosa sycophantic. "You let me do that, Miss Lawson. You ruin them pretty hands." "Ain't none of my business, Miss Lawson, ma'am, but there's nasty talk going around. There's them a-saying it ain't right, you living here, alongside Mr. Childerhouse and not married. Me, I don't like to hear no such talk."

Rather touching really. "That's all right, Rosa, I don't mind."

"You aim to get married?"

A difficult question. In his lucid moments, Rob was still urging her to go home; there were other times, drunken times, when he said, "Don't leave me." But he wouldn't mention marriage except in a negative way, "It wouldn't be fair." "It'd be the ruin of you." "D'you want to spend the rest of your days tied to a drunk?"

"Ain't none of my business," Rosa said again, "but the time Mr. Childerhouse took sick, poor man, I just thought to myself, Bless the Lord he ain't got no poor wife to sorrow for him."

After that it would have seemed churlish to suggest that when Rosa went marketing—as she continued to do, because Rob said she was likely to get better value for money—she should give some account of what she spent, and sometimes, at least, bring back some change. There was also the matter of Rosa's evening visitors who were, Kathy had seen for herself, lavishly supplied with food and beer. The keep of the four dependent children was, no doubt, part of her wage, but was it really usual for an employer to feed so many friends?

She had sense enough not to mention such things to Rob whose temper these days was uncertain; time enough for such trivialities when the main problem was solved.

She applied herself to that with every bit of cunning and ingenuity she possessed. It was supremely important not to make him feel that he was being watched and supervised. Once, having ascertained that he still had the car, she suggested an evening out. "I brought some pretty dresses," she said.

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He said surlily, "I don't intend to show my face in Freeport. They banished me and I'll stay banished. But if you want to show off your finery—" How unkind! But then, in this sort of mood he could be— "there's a place up on the Mountain Road."

Despite this grudging start-off they had a pleasant evening, enjoyed their dinner and danced a little. Almost like old times. Before the meal they had a Jamaica Flower cocktail, at dinner they shared a half bottle of wine, with their coffee she had a coffee liqueur and Rob had one rum. This—a fairly normal amount of drink for an evening out—seemed to have no effect on him at all; he was neither truculent, nor depressed. The moment they were at home, however, he said, "Gosh, I do want a drink," and went to the cupboard.

She said, "Oh no, Rob. We've had a lovely evening. Let's call it a day."

"I haven't had a proper drink all evening." The twitching in his eyelids and cheeks was very noticeable, and his hands shook.

"You know, I'm sure there's something wrong with you, darling. Nothing to do with drinking. Will you, as a favour to me, see a doctor?"

"You trying to get me shoved into an inebriates' home? Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. But I did my best to warn you, didn't I? I've asked you, implored you to go back home. Can't you see that what you're doing is useless, and cruel. All you can do for me at this stage is to leave me alone in peace."

She thought to herself: If you leapt into deep water to try to save a drowning man who proved to be a determined suicide, how long must you struggle before deciding to save yourself? Must you hold on, and drown too? But if the man were the one you loved, you could not give up, somehow you had to go on.

Every day was hotter than the one before. The little house, set halfway down the slope and well shaded by cotton-silk trees, was shady but airless. Several times a day Kathy would think—Air, I must have air, and go scrambling up to the road level where even the wind seemed hot. She found it difficult to sleep.

"You begin to look real peaked, Miss Lawson," Rosa said. "And Mr. Childerhouse, he worrying about you, doing hisself no good neither."

If she'd said, "Go home," it couldn't have been clearer.

On the ninth day it was hotter than ever. Just before midday Rob had come in, drunk his rum, lain down on the settee and

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drifted off to sleep. Kathy went to the fridge, poured herself a glass of orange juice and carried it into the sitting-room. The flowers were dead and should have been replaced; at one point the curtain sagged from a loose hook. She'd meant to put that right before this. Was she getting into slothful, tropical ways?

The orange juice slid down, chill and delicious; almost before the glass was empty she was conscious of an enormous, all-pervading sense of well-being. It was difficult to define because there was nothing with which to compare it; the heavy, sweating, heat-bothered body became light as a bubble, and nothing mattered, nothing at all. Why bother about changing the flowers, the new ones would be dead tomorrow; as for the curtain, who cared whether it sagged or not? Even the pressing problem of Rob's illness seemed to lose importance; something would happen to put everything right; people worried too much, that was the whole trouble . . . Lassitude mingled with her blissful sense of comfort and soon she was asleep.

When, almost five hours later, she woke, she felt hideously unwell, with an ache and a tremor in all her bones and a feeling of nausea. It was like the onset of a bad bout of influenza, only much worse. When she took her temperature, however, there was no evidence of fever. Her optimism had fled. Rob had gone, as he did on most days, to pay his last perfunctory visit to the mill, but her mind's eye showed him, sunk in drunken slumber on the settee and she admitted to herself, for the first time, that it was hopeless. She might just as well do what he—and Rosa—wanted, go back home. But England, in her present mood, looked dull and grey and hopeless too. There was nowhere to turn, nobody to whom to turn, nothing to want, or to try for . . .

She was thirsty, having missed her tea; too late for tea now, and too much bother. Orange juice, that was it; cool, refreshing, comforting orange juice; she could hardly wait and hurrying into the kitchen took a clean glass from the dresser which Rosa had so unwillingly scrubbed and went to the refrigerator. There, with her hand on the handle of the door, she paused.

Fanciful, idiotic, mad, but not a notion which, in the circumstances she could afford to ignore. She must ignore nothing that might, by the wildest stretch of imagination, provide a clue. She remembered the way in which, *whenever he drank rum at home*, the sick man's face which was now Rob's, lost some of its haggardness, how his mood improved, how, finally, he slept, to wake twitching and shaking and despondent. Hadn't she, this very afternoon, had a taste of the same experience? And wasn't she now, at this minute, rushing to the jug of orange

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juice impelled by much the same craving as sent Rob to the cupboard where the rum was kept?

Moving like a sleepwalker she went into the sitting-room and opened the cupboard. It held three bottles, two full, one about half full, all of a brand not intended for export and called, simply, naively, *Our Own*.

Well, one could only try. She snatched up her purse and went scrambling up the path on to the road, praying she had time, praying that she wouldn't meet Rob coming home. Or run into him as she came back. To that extent, at least, her prayers were answered and when he did come in and went almost automatically to the cupboard—(And this I *must* remember, always, the way I went to the fridge!)—there were three bottles, two full and one half full, all branded *Our Own*.

As usual, with something of punctilious politeness and something of defiance, he said, "A drink, Kathy?"

"Yes, please."

"I'll get the orange juice."

"No, don't. I've had a surfeit of orange juice today. I'll have it neat, like you."

Try not to watch too obviously. But the most careless observer must see that tonight the rum was having no more effect than any ordinary pre-dinner drink. He even turned the bottle about and looked, puzzled, at the label.

She remembered how, after one dose, after her first dose, everything had seemed to be well, every physical ill soothed, every mental problem solved. Deadly, wicked, destructive, devilish thing whatever it was—and it had been working on him ever since October. Sympathy for him twisted her very vitals. It was like . . . it was like watching a child beginning to walk; you knew he'd fall, bump his head and wail, but what could you do, save wait and watch?

"I don't know," Rob said at last, twitching and shaking. "I've heard of bottles being filled up with cold tea. I reckon we've hit on one."

He got up, went to the cupboard, took out a fresh bottle, opened it and poured from it. He drank and she could see him waiting for the lift, the easement that should follow. When it failed to come he fidgeted about, twitching and jerking, complaining, for the first time in her hearing about the heat, the stuffiness of the little house.

"Let's go out," she said. "Let's drive to the beach. It's sure to be cooler there."

He looked down at his shaking hands, then he said, in

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THE BEST WRITERS

Gerald Kersh
H. E. Bates
Geoffrey Household
Michael Gilbert
Arthur C. Clarke
Ray Bradbury
Simenon
C. S. Forester
Rhys Davies
William Saroyan
Evan Hunter

appear in

argosy

the short story magazine

THE BEST FICTION

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a voice of complete defeat, "I don't think I'm fit to drive."

"Then I will," she said.

They lay on the white beach; behind them a fringe of palms thrust raggedly into the midnight-blue, thickly starred sky. The sea seemed to hold a phosphorescent light, each gently-breaking wave seeming to caress the shore. No setting could ever have been more romantic, few conversations held in such circumstances more strictly practical.

"On Saturday," he said, "you must go home, Kathy. Tonight I reached the beginning of the last stage, and it isn't going to be pleasant to watch. I won't *be* watched!"

"What do you mean—the last stage?" she asked carefully.

"Tonight I realised that I was a drunk who'd got past the stage when drinking did any good. I suppose it takes people different ways; some get DTs, some get pneumonia. And they're lucky, I tell you. Look at me..." he held out his shaking hands. "I'm the specially cursed one, the one drink can't do anything for any more."

She almost told him her suspicions then, but she felt she must be sure. His agony was obvious and her attempts to speak soothingly and cheerfully made her feel like a chatty visitor by the bed of someone gravely ill. "It might not be that," she said. "You never were a drinker, Rob, you know that. All the time that we... all the time you were home on leave, what did you ever drink but an occasional gin and tonic and a half pint of beer? Something started you on rum and for a while you liked it, now you've had enough. Maybe it's like some other complaints, self-healing."

"Good grief," he said impatiently. "That shows how little you understand. If you knew how I felt. And," his voice rose, "even if it was self-healing as you so smugly call it, what is there left? I'm disgraced, shovelled out on to that dunghill, Cork's Harbour, given a job that everybody knows is no job at all, just because they didn't want to see an old employee turn beachcomber."

"We could go somewhere else," she said.

"Wel Wel Kathy will you get into your head that I don't intend to marry you. There was a man, he had a good steady job, with prospects of promotion, and a modestly good reputation, *he* asked you to marry him. But he's dead. In his place you've got a drooling, shaking zombi, not fit to be in the same room with any decent woman."

"That's for me to decide, isn't it? I happen to be very fond of my zombi."

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But he would not be wooed. He made a sound of vast, almost unbearable impatience and leapt to his feet. "Let's go," he said. "I've had enough of this."

Driving home she thought, Well, anyway, if we ever do get married I shan't be one of those starry-eyed brides who think it's roses, roses all the way and feel the world has ended the first time he speaks crossly.

At home he went, defiantly, to his cupboard, poured rum into a glass, drank, waited. Then with a sweeping gesture of despair he knocked the glass from the table. "I've had it," he said. "What am I going to do now?"

"Just wait," she said. "Wait. I know you'll be better."

It was almost frighteningly easy to get him to drink a cup of tea and swallow a couple of aspirins.

ROSA," Kathy said next day, "I want you to tell me exactly what it is you've been putting into Mr. Childerhouse's rum—and into my orange juice, yesterday."

That morning Rosa's French blood seemed to be in the ascendant; she looked like a decent old Breton peasant unjustly accused of over-charging for a cheese. "I dunno what you talking about, Miss Lawson. Me, I never done put nothing in Mr. Childerhouse's drink. What for I do such a thing?"

"I'm not much interested in the reason. I'm asking what it was. If you don't choose to tell me, I have another way of finding out. The only thing is that *might* lead to trouble."

"Trouble? I ain't done nothing to make trouble, Miss Lawson. I ain't done nothing, 'cept look after Mr. Childerhouse best I could."

"Oh well," Kathy said, seemingly casual. "I've got the rum, and the orange juice, and I shall take them into Freeport and have them analysed."

"Analysed—what's that?"

"Examined by a chemist, who will be able to tell me exactly what *somebody*, somebody who'd been near the rum and the orange juice, put into them. And if it's a dangerous substance, as I think it is, then I shall go to the police."

Rosa, who had been standing, sat down suddenly on a broken-backed chair. She lost her sturdy French peasant look. "You wouldn't do that, Miss. Not that."

"I'm going to do it now. Unless you can give me some good reason not to . . ."

"I give you reason, Miss Lawson. Ain't nothing dangerous,

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I swear. What you want I should swear on? Our Lawd and all the saints? I swear, on our Lawd and all the saints, ain't nothing dangerous. Anything dangerous get in them drinks, wasn't me put it there. All I did was put in a little magic drop."

(Far away a child's voice said, "Miss, they do black magic there.")

Kathy said sternly, "You'd better tell me all about it, from the beginning. And mind, I want the truth."

It was a pathetic, and at the same time terrifying story. Rosa's husband had died, leaving her with six children, two of working age, four young. "Easy enough to get work, Miss, but not a place to have them with me and cook for one cook for all." But Rob, in the spacious new bungalow at Point Clear, a man alone, out much of the time, had no objection to housing and feeding Rosa's brood. "Till he marry, Miss. He tell me that, first day, everything change when he marry." In October he'd told Rosa that the time for the marriage was fixed and Rosa had told a friend. "I say to him, 'John Thomas, good easy time come to end at Eastertime,' and John Thomas he tell me, why don't I ask the Old Woman make me some magic, make Mr. Childerhouse think so highly of me he ask me to stay whether he married or not." So she'd done just that. It was a "liking magic," akin to a love potion, but aimed at inspiring faithful affection, not love.

"And it work," Rosa said, "Mr. Childerhouse, he like how I cook, he never complain. He get poorly and he get moved but he stick to Rosa." (Later on this would be worth a second thought, for it was true; Rob would never hear a word against Rosa.) The sequel needed hardly to be put into words. "First I think maybe you go home where you belong, but you stay. And you are a very fussy, fancy lady, Miss Lawson. Nothing I do please you, so I think, what work for him, work for her maybe and so I put liking drops in your orange juice . . ." Suddenly every other consideration slipped away and there was Rosa, the primeval human being, faced with the universal mystery. "Miss Lawson, you didn't drink that orange juice, you don't like me today any more'n you did yesterday. How you know the liking drops got in that jug?"

But you're wrong, Kathy thought. You're a wicked, scheming old heathen, but as devoted a mother as a hen partridge—I must rear my chicks, to hell with everything else. I like that, and if we get out of this muddle and if you'll clean up a bit I'm quite prepared for you to stay.

"Never mind how I knew. I knew. And what you've done is a very, very wicked thing indeed. Did it never occur to you

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that the liking drops as you call them were what was making Mr. Childerhouse ill? "

"No, ma'am . . . Miss Lawson, Miss, that ain't true. What for would I make him ill and him so good to me? You got eyes, Miss. You surely must know what ail Mr. Childerhouse. He drink too much."

What could you say to a person who reasoned like that? "Do you know, Rosa, what the liking drops are made of? "

"I don't know no magic, Miss. The Old Woman, she live halfway up the mountain; she grow stuff and she hunt stuff, leaves and flowers and roots and then she make drops or powders or plasters, the same as her mother and her granny did. That all I know."

Leaves! Just possibly a form of cocaine. If so, six months wasn't too long; well within the margin of time needed for real addiction. There was hope . . .

"You do understand, Rosa, that you're never, never to tamper with anything we eat or drink again? "

"Wouldn't be no purpose to it," Rosa said simply. "Once it spoke of, all magic flee."

By the time of Rob's usual homecoming, Kathy had brought in fresh flowers and rehung the sagging curtain. Over lunch she planned to tell him the whole story and suggest that immediately afterwards they go down to Freeport in search of a doctor. If the liking drops actually were a crude form of cocaine, poor old Rob was in for a bad time, but a doctor could help.

Time crawled by, half past twelve, one o'clock, half past. In all her stay she had never known Rob to be late. Suddenly she thought of how he had looked that morning, wretchedly ill, pallid and unsteady, and she realised that she had been a fool. Clumsy, blundering fool to cut off his supplies so abruptly and without a word of explanation. She pictured him in a state of collapse on the sugar mill floor. Drunk again, they'd say. Begun early today. She knew, from a hundred bitter remarks that he had made, that he was not popular, was regarded more or less as an interloper, in the Cork's Harbour mill. They'd let him lie and die—and they'd be less to blame than she was.

She went scrambling crazily up the stony path and emerged in the glare, the blast furnace heat at the top. The mill lay to the right, beyond the workers' little houses and the truck shop. In its yard a few people were beginning to move languidly about after their midday siesta. The first man whom she asked where was she likely to find Mr. Childerhouse merely gaped at her, the

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second denied all knowledge, but the next said, " Mr. Chiderhouse, he doan come back in afternoon," but he pointed out the direction of the office.

Somewhere, somebody pecked half-heartedly at a typewriter, but the first small room she entered was empty. A linen jacket hung over the back of a chair—Rob's; she recognised it in some indefinable way; and on a battered filing cabinet lay his ancient, sun-yellowed panama hat. On a day like this he would not have gone out hatless; he was in the building, but where?

She threw open another door and was confronted with a brown Buddha, asleep in a chair, his tan-shoed feet on his desk.

The English schoolmarm took charge and she rapped sharply with her knuckles on the desk top and said, " Wake up! "

Buddha woke and regarded her with a gaze of infinite benignity, tempered perhaps with a tinge of mild surprise.

" I'm looking for Mr. Childerhouse," she said.

" Oh yes," he said agreeably.

" Well, where is he? "

" I do not know, madam. Mr. Childerhouse is not in the habit of informing me of his whereabouts. So I can only tell you that I happened to see him take his car and drive away."

" When? Which way did he go? "

" The time . . . oh, shortly after eleven. As for which way, there is only one way out of Cork's Harbour."

" Had you seen him, before he drove away? I'm worried about him. Did you happen to notice how he seemed? "

" Occupying adjacent offices," Buddha explained gently, " we were bound to see one another. But Mr. Childerhouse is not much inclined to conversation, especially in the early morning. He looked much as usual, except . . . " he dredged up a crumb of information and presented it to her, helpfully. " When he left he appeared to be somewhat excited. Yes, he ran towards his car and drove away very quickly, as though—as though the devil were after him." He was proud of the simile, it was idiomatic English which marked the truly educated man. And as it was only a simile, he couldn't for the life of him see why the remark should bleach the woman's face until it was as white as the wall behind her. Or why she should turn and without another word, go away, moving like someone very old, or blind.

She could see it all, see just what she'd done. By eleven o'clock this morning Rob would have been without his drug, whatever it was, for almost twenty-four hours; his physical suffering would be at its worst, and allied to it, his mistaken certainty that he was a drinker whom drink could never affect

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again. In a sudden fit of utter desperation he'd felt there was nothing to live for. She thought of the dozens of places along that road where a car could go over the edge and fall, and fall, and fall . . .

And it was all her fault. She could see now exactly how she should have set about the business. Talked to Rosa first, before cutting off Rob's supplies; then told him, explained, asked him to co-operate in his own cure. She'd acted very thoughtlessly, worse, arrogantly. And she'd spend the rest of her life being sorry.

She moved across the mill yard towards the gate like a somnambulist, unaware of the curious glances which followed her, unaware that she was holding her clenched hands to the base of her throat, or that the tears were running unchecked down her face. She walked without direction, without purpose, passing without recognition, the mailbox and the opening of the path that led down to the place which lately she had called home. She walked in the middle of the road. A boy, furiously riding a bicycle much too big for him, steered straight at her, for the pleasure of seeing her jump aside, and when she did not was obliged to swerve so sharply to avoid her that he almost fell from his insecure perch. She walked on, calling herself a murderess.

She was oblivious even of the car's approach, of the loud, frantic squeal of hastily-applied brakes. It wasn't until Rob's voice said, " Kathy! " that she woke.

Even then it seemed unreal. She'd visualised him, desperate, suicidal, lying broken and dead at the bottom of the tree-filled ravine, and it was difficult to understand, all in a moment, why he should be here, on the heat-shimmering road, clad in a pair of filthy overalls, his face all streaked with black oil. But not dead. Oh, thank God, not dead. The silent outpouring of tears gave way to the loud, half-hysterical crying of relief.

" What happened? What's the matter ?" he asked, holding her with hands which left black marks wherever they touched.

" I thought you were . . . I thought something had happened to you . . . " And even as she said it, she saw that something had, for here, grown thin, aged by three years and wearing dirty working clothes was the man she knew, not the stranger of the last ten days.

" But I sent you word," he said. " I did at least remember to do that. I couldn't know, then, how long I'd be, so I told the first boy I could get hold of—Sammy it was, I think—to run round and tell you I might be very late."

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"He never came. You didn't come in and you weren't at the mill. I was most terribly worried."

"I can see that. Come on, get in the car. You shouldn't be out without a hat at this time of day. I'll limb that Sammy, lazy little brute. I wanted you to know. My first thought was, —Kathy'll be pleased. Darling, try to overlook that you didn't get my message and got in a flap, and be pleased. Will you?"

She said, "Pleased is such a feeble word . . ." and then realised that they were not talking about the same thing at all. "Tell me what happened."

"They had to send for me, Kathy. They had to send for me. Down at the main mill, the one near Point Clear. Where I was banished from!" He made a creditable effort to keep the malicious pleasure, and the pride from his voice, but they showed through. "The bearings on the crushing plant went and the toffee-nosed bloke they'd put in my place, he hadn't a clue. They'd had a twelve-hour stoppage. Then they sent for me."

"And you put it right."

He said modestly, "Well, it was working when I left. Old Chambers was there; he was most suitably impressed." He gave a short sharp bark of laughter. "That's the way it is, darling. You sweat your guts out for years and nobody notices; you make a slip, or two, and you're out. Then you go and do something perfectly simple and straightforward, the sort of things you've done dozens of times, and they all fall on their faces and think you've worked a miracle. I'll bet you anything you like we'll be back at Point Clear in a couple of months, probably less."

She noticed that unconscious "we" but made no comment. Her mind had slipped aside to regard, with awe and amazement, what was, to all intents and purposes a miracle. Because she'd been hasty and rash and lacking in foresight Rob had gone to bed last night sober, and undoped, therefore this morning he was—however ill he felt—in better condition to deal with an emergency than he had been for several months. And his success today, the reawakening of interest in his work, the renewal of hope and ambition and the admiration of other men, were just what would be needed to help him over the difficult time ahead.

Even as she put her hand over one of his blackened ones and squeezed it and said, "How wonderful, darling. Oh I am so glad . . . and so proud," she was thinking: Magic, it almost seems like magic.

Andrew Garve's enthralling new novel
—begins in next month's ARGOSY

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Leisure-Pleasure

FEW who drink and enjoy Australian wines realise that it is one hundred and seventy-seven years since the first vines were planted there, in Farm Cove, by Captain Arthur Phillip, the first Governor of New South Wales. He had brought them in his flag ship H.M.S. *Sirius* from the vineyards of Rio de Janeiro and the Cape of Good Hope.

Today there are three main wine-producing areas—the Swan Valley near Perth in Western Australia; Roma, north west of Brisbane; and the very large region stretching from Adelaide to Sydney, embracing such famous vineyards as those of the Hunter, Murray, and Barossa Valleys, Great Western, Tahbilk and Swan Hill.

The soil and climate of these areas are near to perfect for wine-producing, and the wines of Australia make no claim to be like those of France, or Germany. They have an individual character all their own—a common feature is that they can be drunk young and are not intended to have a long life.

The range of Australian wines is one of the widest in the world, for it includes sherries; red, white and rosé table wines; sweet wines of Sauterne type; red and white sparkling wines; and port-type dessert wines.

Australia also makes substantial quantities of brandy. The wine-making equipment is some of the most modern in the world, and Australian experts are to be found in vineyards in many countries.

The most comprehensive list of Australian wines in Britain is held by the Australian Wine Centre at 25 Frith Street, in London's Soho. There are no less than 26 sherries on it, ranging in price from about 12s. to 16s. per bottle. The dry wines are of particular charm, such as Penfold's Pale Dry Fino, Seppelt's Pale Dry Solero and Stonyfell Extra Dry. Of the sweet sherries Mildara Chestnut Teal and Lindemann's Cream are well worth keeping in mind.

Among the Australian wines are some clarets and burgundies

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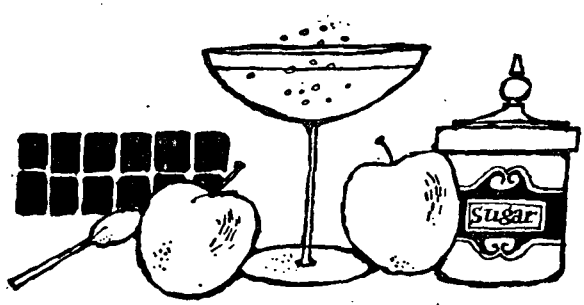
of real character, such as Mildara Vintage Claret, Chateau Tahbilk Claret, Edwards and Chaffey Seaview Cabernet Sauvignon, Penfold's Royal Reserve Burgundy, and Gramp's Orlando Burgundy. The prices of the clarets and burgundies range from 8s. 6d. to about 12s. 6d., and to mention these wines by name is not to detract from the others on the list.

The Australians might be ready to admit that in the United Kingdom climate their red table wines go better than the white, but Gramp's Orlando Barossa Riesling Spaetlese is a wine of notable quality. The same can be said of the Lindemann's Grenache Rosé, which has a splendid colour and is much better than a good deal of what comes from France and Portugal.

The dessert wines will suit those who like rich, sweet wines. Of a list of fifteen, the new customer for Australian wines might well start with Smith's Yalumba Galway Pipe, Mildara Supreme V.O. Tawny, and Penfold's Royal Reserve Muscat. For the dessert wines the price range is from 11s. 6d. to 18s. per bottle, and they are good value for money. They have sufficient personality to be drunk instead of port at the end of the meal, or, in wintry weather, at mid-morning with a biscuit.

As with the South African, Australian brandies do not aspire to compare with French cognacs, and as the dearest of them is about 53s. they are not in the same price range. Nevertheless Mildara Fine Old Pot Still and Angove's St. Agnes Liqueur are among the Australian brandies, very popular in Canada, one can buy with confidence. But that can be said of the Commonwealth's wines in general. The wine trade in Britain has shown a good deal of unnecessary and unjustified snobbery about Australian wines which, happily, is diminishing since they have been praised by one of the greatest living experts, M. André Simon.

J.B.W.



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Want a library of your own? Then get hold of a Dimple Haig Whisky bottle, empty it in the usual manner, then start putting in all your sixpenny pieces until you've got together about £5.

Plan with a bit of thought and skill and you will be able to buy a collection in paperbacks that £50 could scarcely have covered even ten years ago.

There's a positive gamut of interests provided for, from culture-vulturing to the selection of the choicest wines and clever recipes from almost every land; poetry from Mediaeval verse to e. e. cummings and Stevie Smith; design, architecture and the arts; the Philosophers and Scholars. There's humour, including such novelists as P. G. Wodehouse (one of my personal blind spots as he has never raised as much as a smile from this sour puss); Henry Cecil and the cartoonists; and a wide enough assortment of most excellent reference books to satisfy any ordinary requirement.

The fiction side of this industry is healthily rampant too, with all the best modern authors represented (and some of the worst as well, though we won't go into that), and the regular monthly issues from the different publishers keeping the titles well up-to-date.

There is only space enough to pick out a few from the new lists—such as two great books about the wars to end war.

First, **Alamein,** one of the greatest battles fought in our history, written as it was seen and actually experienced by the men who fought there, from Montgomery himself to a soldier in the ranks. C. E. Lucas Phillips, who wrote it from personal interviews as well as official sources, has done a magnificent job. (Pan Books 6s.)

The second, **Old Soldiers Never Die,** was written some twenty years ago by Private Frank Richards, one of the first detachment to land in France after war was declared in 1914 and who, surprisingly enough, lived to tell the tale and finally faded away at a ripe old age quite recently.

This is an unrivalled, brutally true, seen-from-the-ranks account, republished with a specially written introduction by Robert Graves, himself a survivor of the same horrible carnage. He starts:

> "What immediate sense a book like this will make to a generation that treats even the Second World War as ancient history, who knows? The grossly mismanaged First World

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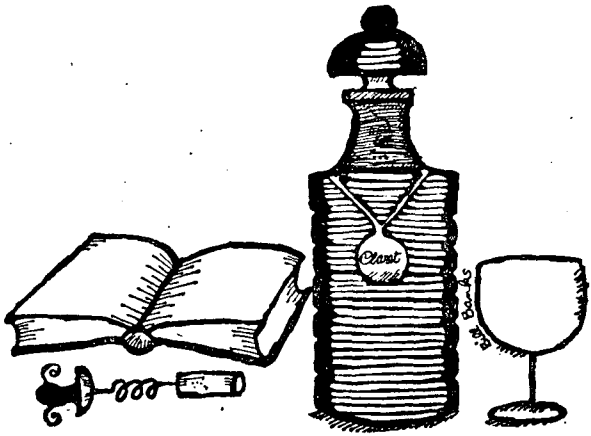

War, into which I plunged as soon as I left school, gave us infantrymen so convenient a measuring-stick for discomfort, grief, pain, fear and horror, that nothing since has greatly daunted us. But it also brought new meanings of courage, patience, loyalty and greatness of spirit; incommunicable, we found, to later times."

We on *Argosy*, Mr. Graves, have no doubts that this is a book that everyone, including the younger generation will certainly want to read. (Faber Paper Covered Edition 7s. 6d.)

Coming as a sensational film starring the delectable Samantha Eggar and he-man Kenneth More, one of the best paperbacks released so far this year is undoubtedly **The Collector** by John Fowles.

This was, I believe, his first novel and it made a terrific impact when the hardback edition hit the bookshops. It's shocking, sensual, original, frightening and just the thing to start reading with a quiet, clear evening stretching out—for, once started, you won't be able to put it down. (Pan Books 5s.)

Another Hillary Waugh—no relation to Alec or Evelyn, he's American and one of the best of his country's crime writers. This is called **The Late Mrs. D,** and is a thundering good book. If, like me, you get special enjoyment from a "murder" if its author succeeds in keeping you guessing right up to the end, then this is for you! (Pan Books 3s. 6d.)

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Turning to hardbacks, **Adventures in Stamp Collecting** by E. H. Spire should delight the philatelists among you. As President Roosevelt, no less, said, this is a hobby that " dispels boredom, broadens our knowledge of lands and peoples and their history, and in innumerable ways enriches life and adds to its joys."

The author himself is not only a collector of note (he started, he says, over forty years ago with a few foreign stamps held in a schoolboy's grubby hand), but is one of the world's accepted authorities and holds office in a formidable number of philatelic societies.

Adventures in Stamp Collecting is just what it says—not only a textbook but great fun and exciting too.

In my early proof copy many of the photographic reproductions are disappointingly grey and indefinite, but this has probably been corrected. (Pelham Books 15s.)

Prize for the most off-putting cover for many a long day goes to that on **The Shiny Narrow Grin.** Author Jane Gaskell once worked on this magazine so we read this latest book of hers with more than usual interest.

Like its jacket, it is off-beat and strange.

Terry the girl, lives a sort of split life, at school by day and in the dance hall, as a preliminary to getting into the bed of this fellow or that, by night.

She meets up with The Boy. The Boy is something different again, something rich and strange and quite unlike her steady, a youth with the revolting name of Fishfingers.

The Boy (" I want him," Terry thinks, " I want The Boy.") has the oddest habits, and it is scarcely surprising when later on, your eyes popping out of your head, you find that he—

But we mustn't spoil things for you. A surprise buy or there's always the nearest library. (Hodder & Stoughton 15s.)

Mimi Sheraton lives in New York, is a successful journalist, grows wistaria up the front of her house and has a six-year-old son called Marc much addicted to The Beatles.

She also knows a lot about food and has written **The Seducer's Cook Book** for those of us who are interested in a big way in other people's wives or husbands, our own wives or husbands, naive young girls (surely rather hard to come by these days?), world-weary divorcees and, naturally, millionaires.

Her recipes sound delicious and her advice seems to this reviewer to be both hair-raising and acute. (André Deutsch 21s.)

J.D.

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OUR MAN IN MOTORS WRITES:

Who said that testing cars is fun? I thought of this as the third avalanche of water slid down my neck and I stepped inadvertently into a puddle half an inch deeper than my right shoe. I limped miserably over to B.M.C.'s latest offer—the **Mini Moke**. When I asked them for something open I hadn't bargained on anything quite as open as this.

Once seated in—I might almost say on—this unusual vehicle, I realised that weather protection afforded cover to my shoes and my head but little between.

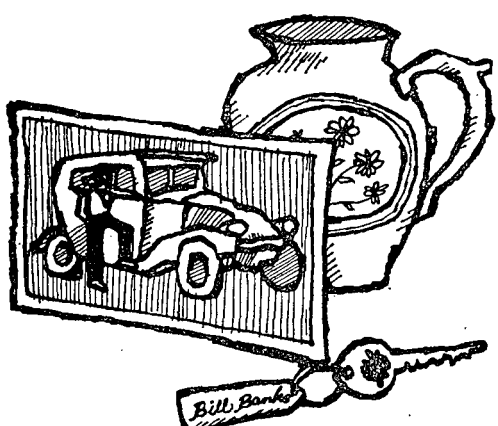
A thirty-mile drive however, seemed to indicate that the rather sketchy-looking hood and windscreen kept off much more than I would have thought possible.

It also showed that the single windscreen wiper is designed specifically for people with an offset head.

A close examination of this vehicle showed that there is nothing fitted to it that isn't absolutely essential—which straightaway eliminates an enormous number of potential rattles that one so often discovers.

Once on the road, and even more off the road, the Moke proves itself a tough and rugged vehicle providing an enormous amount of fun and entertainment.

Handling on the road is very similar to the standard Mini, except that the very light tail is more inclined to drift out a little on fast bends.



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Acceleration is quite good and brakes are effective, though it was possible to lock the rear wheels in the damp, despite the pressure-linking valve that is fitted to overcome this. Top speed is slightly lower than the standard Mini saloon, probably due to the Moke's complete lack of aerodynamics.

The seating, which at first sight seems a bit primitive—about an inch of foam rubber covered with vinyl over a shaped metal bucket seat—proved remarkably comfortable in spite of my original doubts.

In rough country the Moke shows up well, the body having no signs of stress and strain under the most severe thumps and jolts. The reason being that the rubber suspension softens out what, in more conventional vehicles, would be some spine-jarring jolts.

Despite normal tread tyres, the Moke provided good traction in wet and muddy conditions, and with a good set of knobbly tyres, should go almost anywhere. With two people, the Moke can be turned in its own length—the tail is light enough to lift and swing round with comparative ease.

The Moke obviously has a place in the market. It is ideal as a cheap-to-run general purpose vehicle for farmers. It is light and nippy and will go a long way on a gallon of petrol—low octane at that. This is a factor which any driver will appreciate!

It is also a fabulous holiday vehicle for inaccessible places—you can drive down to beach or lake loaded with water skis, or even people!

But whatever use it is put to, it needs one or two additions and amendments.

It desperately needs some sort of parcel shelf at the front—there is nowhere, but nowhere, for a packet of cigarettes or a screwdriver or a ball of string.

It needs a small strip of metal to channel water away from the interior where the windscreen extension meets the body side. And whilst it has three roomy lockers in the body sides, they have to be opened with a screwdriver and are non-lockable, as is the petrol filler cap—locks for these are essential in some overseas markets.

If B.M.C. can add a little more to the basic specification at the same price (£405 with just one seat), it should do well. Certainly it was the most entertaining vehicle I have driven for a long time. And with its sturdy construction and petrol consumption of around 38 m.p.h. it should be comfortable, satisfying and economical to run.

K.F.

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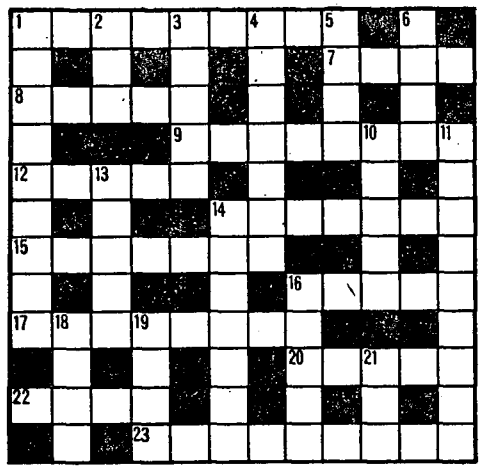
TEN MINUTE CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 Dogs at home in this London borough (9).
7 Groggy? Naturally, with this! (4).
8 Giraffe-like animal (5).
9 Urgent message? (8).
12 It's a lot of paper! (5).
14 He started the business (7).
15 Mend (5, 2).
16 Say yes (5).
17 White-rose supporters (8).
20 Long poem's division (5).
22 Ring round the moon (4).
23 A mere trifle (9).

DOWN

1 A life (9).
2 Infusion (3).
3 Doors for actors? (5).
4 Edible bivalve (7).
5 Eager and expectant(4).
6 Kind of bean (4).
10 Corollary (5).
11 Used in signals (5, 4).



13 Communion Table (5).
14 Much ado about nothing (7).
16 Race-course (5).
18 Exam—of the mouth? (4).
19 Small lump of coal (4).
21 It's nothing (3).

(Solution on page 125)

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (JANUARY ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Dickens.* 5, *Macduff.* 9, *Sincere.* 10, *Rarebit.* 11, *Aylesbury.* 12, *Spree.* 13, *Tusks.* 15, *Attempted.* 17, *Racketeer.* 19, *Soggy.* 22, *Doing.* 23, *Chainmail.* 25, *Old-time.* 26, *Leg-pull.* 27, *Tanager.* 28, *Nest-egg.*
Down 1, *Descant.* 2, *Candles.* 3, *Evens.* 4, *Speculate.* 5, *Marry.* 6, *Christmas.* 7, *Unburnt.* 8, *Fathead.* 14, *Sleighing.* 16, *Tarpaulin.* 17, *Redcoat.* 18, *Chidden.* 20, *Granule.* 21, *Yule-log.* 23, *Cheer.* 24, *Negus.*

SOLUTION TO THE PUZZLE ON PAGE 35

Twelve minutes to ten.

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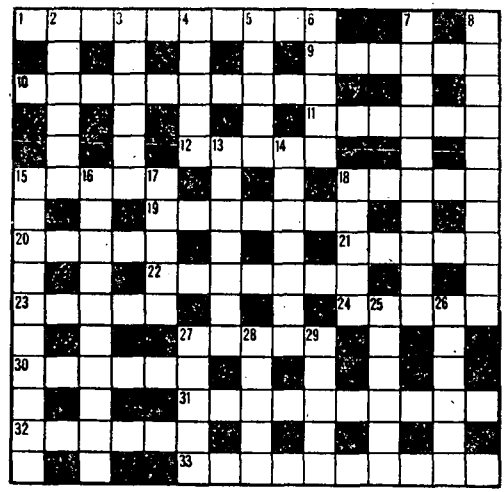
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 Night-watchman? (10).

9 There's a bit for everyone (6).

10 Flowers put in the ground in London (10).

11 Port doesn't want shaking! (6).

12 Give it a glossy surface! (5).

15 Handy for music (5).

18 "Mint and —— and cummin" (St. Matthew) (5).

19 How a woman knows it isn't U? (7).

20 Throat stuff (5).

21 Walking-stick! (5).

22 A girl takes this cup? (7).

23 Positively a lump! (5).

24 Got the drift of his singing? (5).

27 A tree means everything to me! (5).

30 Scrawl by an American? (6).

31 Get wind of a good play (3, 7).

32 Against the accused (6).

33 Lustrous silk fabric (10).

DOWN

2 Gray cat is lame? (6).

3 "Pluck from the memory a ——sorrow" (*Macbeth*) (6).

4 Followed instinctively? (5).

5 Rise for jockey? (5).

6 Beam on the cloth? (5).

7 Soviet line in entertainment? (10).

8 Useless law kept only in the post office? (4, 6).

13 Expert in vital statistics? (7).

14 First sign (7).

15 Like the ark on Ararat? (4, 3, 3).

16 No hands above 9 in this Somerset village! (10).

17 "His sister's husband's ——" (Carroll) (5).

18 Useful quality, this (5).

25 Lover of Handel opera? (6).

26 Old prayer (6).

27 Met a learner on this kind of road (5).

28 A male factor! (5).

29 City to the fore? (5).

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Yorkshire's Young Ones.....No. 4

Simon and Clare take a big decision

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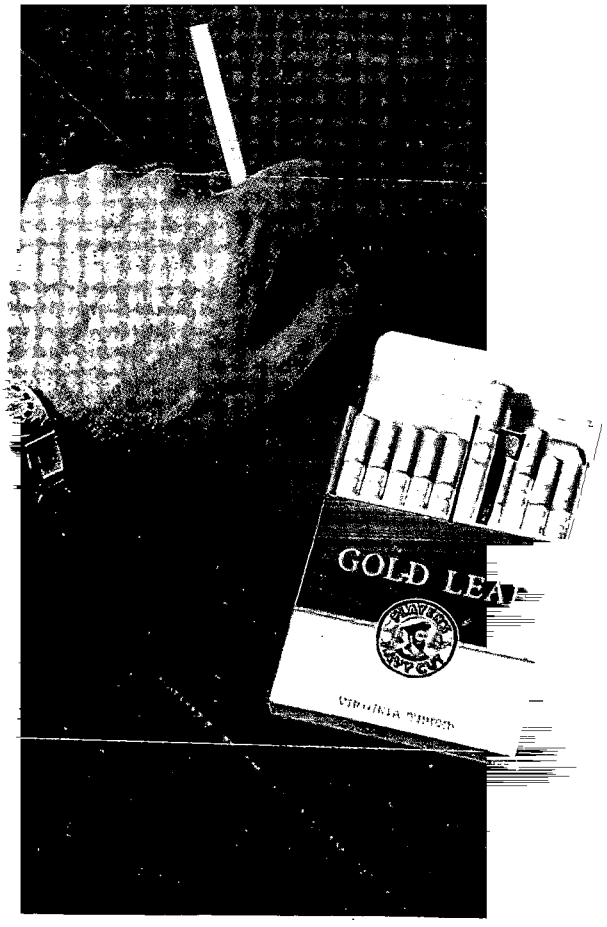

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